Building the Kingdom of Man: Ayn Rand's Reclamation of Romantic Architecture

By

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"The corn hasn't quite matured if it's still reading Ayn Rand."

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Preface

I came to this project a little less than a year ago with grand ideas about David Foster Wallace and Postmodernism. I wanted to talk about Nietzsche and Faulkner and Pynchon and Vonnegut and now, many pages later, I'm looking back and thinking how glad I am that I *didn't* do that. I came to Ayn Rand because, whether you agree or disagree with her, there's just so much to talk about. This is especially true in the realm of aesthetics. Her emphasis on the preeminent importance of art in our world, is regrettably rare. Everywhere we go—cinemas, cities, suburbs, museums—an implicit philosophy is encoded in structures and images. They form a shadowy picture of mankind and every day they ask us either to accept or to deny this vision. As Rand notes: "The reason why art has such a profoundly *personal* significance for men is that art confirms or denies the efficacy of a man's consciousness, according to whether an art work supports or negates his own fundamental view of reality" (*Romantic Manifesto* 23). I think that Rand is right about this. When we speak about art and its manifestations in the world, we're not just making idle observations, we're talking about metaphysics. The most important questions Rand asks are not economic or political, but existential: What do you think about the world and why? I can't think of a more important question.

With that being said, I and this project owe a special thanks to Dr. David Ross. Your feedback and advice has been truly invaluable—you are, as always, *il miglior fabbro*.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

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> Ayn Rand became famous for her philosophy of Objectivism, which is a nice way of saying: being a selfish asshole. Rand illustrated her beliefs in novels like *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*—stories about rapey heroes complaining about how no one appreciates their true genius [...]. Ayn Rand has always been popular with teenagers, but she's something you're supposed to grow out of like ska music or hand-jobs. Curiously though, Rand's popularity persists among a certain type of adult. Yes, unbelievably, Mark Cuban's favorite book is about a misunderstood visionary who blows things up when he doesn't get his way. Cuban even named his 287 ft yacht "Fountainhead" because sometimes, having a 287 ft yacht just isn't enough to warn people you're a douchebag. (*Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*)

John Oliver offers the above in a segment titled "Ayn Rand—How is this Still a Thing?" Clips of Rand play in the background and the clap-track booms for the punch lines— this, apparently, is the intellectual level of television today. People have been trying to sully Rand's name for nearly eighty years, yet the critiques have never been as brazenly ignorant or flagrantly illiterate as Oliver's smear. His polemic drips with elitism and ridicules the puny minds intrigued by Ayn Rand. Despite a Cambridge degree in English literature, Oliver's "comedy" stoops to the language of bathroom stalls and suggests that well-adjusted people outgrow Rand, just as they outgrow "hand jobs." Though hostile reviews of Rand's literature are far from the exception, Oliver's patent vulgarity gives the sense that something has gone cynically awry. As Oliver pokes fun indiscriminately and dishonestly, it appears ridicule has become an end in itself. Glib mockery is the verbal club of intellectual fraud and Rand is its sacrificial lamb.

"Who are you, Ayn Rand?" His words are investigative and unrelenting, and Mike Wallace speaks them with an intimidating pause—it's exactly the way journalism should be, and

once was. This simple question is the key phrase in one of the iconic interviews of early television. In this 1959 sit-down, Wallace confronts Rand in nearly thirty minutes of live interrogative questioning. There is no set and no laughter played on loop—there's only a spotlight, a table, and microphones at chest level. What's asked of us is only that we think, that we use our minds to decipher a conversation and determine by logic and by sound argument who is right and who is wrong. It's an opportunity rarely afforded to us in television today. While Oliver bludgeons his audience into agreement, ridiculing the fools who dare to dissent, Wallace instead offers these closing words:

> Ayn, I'm sure that you have stimulated a good many people, more people than already have, to read your book *Atlas Shrugged*, and *The Fountainhead*, and I'm equally sure they will be stimulated for the reading, indeed, if they do not agree...As we said at the outset, "If Ayn Rand's ideas were ever to take hold, they would revolutionize the world." And to those who would reject her philosophy, Miss Rand hurls this challenge. She has said, "For the past 2000 years the world has been dominated by other philosophies. Look around you; consider the results." We thank Ayn Rand for adding her portrait to our gallery. One of the people other people are interested in. Mike Wallace...Goodbye. (Rand *The Mike Wallace Interview*)

While he was no great admirer of Rand's philosophy or works, Wallace still places the onus of judgement on the audience. What has happened to this bygone era of honesty and dignity?—qualities now terribly out of fashion.

Ayn Rand is the author of what are probably the contemporary world's most discussed yet least read novels. News outlets and prime-time TV annually drag her corpse from the grave, bashing it mercilessly as shallow political comedy. The crowd always laughs. Maybe they have heard of her "Utopia of Greed," but how many have slogged through *Atlas Shrugged'*s 1200 pages? Cast as the paragon of pocket-rifling capitalism, Rand is ignored for her aesthetic contributions, and as her first novel approaches its centennial, the truth of Rand's life and work

has become distant memory. Deprecated by critics as YA fiction shilling for libertarianism, Rand's novels have become pawns in a larger political game. What's left is a wretched caricature of the woman and her work.

Although often pigeon-holed as the doyenne of extremist free-market economic theory, Rand's garden-variety libertarianism is the least interesting thing about her and seems an insufficient explanation for the vitriol she inspires. Nonetheless, she's been denounced as an amoral atheist by the fundamentalist right and as a callous, greedy materialist by the left. Rand is abandoned in political limbo—a purgatory of eternal suffering as critics of every imaginable leaning spit hostility at her soul. In a 1957 issue of the staunchly conservative *National Review,* Whittaker Chambers elaborately argues that Rand's godless world is destined to end in hedonist chaos. His allusion to Nietzschean supermen evokes Nazi eugenics and Chambers even compares her certitude to the zealotry that fomented the holocaust.

> I can recall no other book in which a tone of overriding arrogance was so implacably sustained...It consistently mistakes raw force for strength and the rawer the force, the more reverent the posture of the mind before it...From almost any page of Atlas Shrugged a voice can be heard, in painful necessity, commanding: "To a gas chamber-go!" (Chambers)

Intellectually lazy comparisons to the Holocaust are not only historically problematic, but often blatantly dishonest, especially in the case of Chambers' appraisal of Ayn Rand. As she's endlessly documented in her work, Rand was disgusted by all totalitarian states and especially abhorred the racism and eugenics of the Nazis' barbaric regime. In her own words: "Racism is a doctrine of, by, and for brutes [...]. Racism negates two aspects of man's life: reason and choice, or mind and morality, replacing them with chemical predestination" (*Virtue of Selfishness* 126). If he meant to characterize Rand's utopian meritocracy as a kind of economic eugenics in its own

right, Chambers is still mistaken. Rand did not envision a society deifying an industrialist master-race—a society in which all but the lonely genius would be left to starve and suffer in the slums of mediocrity. Rand did not disdain workers or scorn the poor, so long as they were diligent and honest, so long as each man strived to achieve the best of which he was able. The portrayal of Rand as a monster of malignant ideology seems at best an issue of limited reading or confirmation bias and at worst a deliberate smear through selective quotation. In reality, Rand was a conventional and minor economic theorist. Her anti-socialist tracts are far from eye-opening, and economics are of secondary concern in her fiction. Rand was simply not an economic giant like Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, or Milton Friedman. These men wrote lengthy capitalist exegeses, but you won't find them dredged up in today's news cycle. Clearly, something more elusive than economic theory spurs the continued fascination with Ayn Rand.

From a young age, Rand refused to conform and correspondingly, her work affronts the twentieth-century. Her books are sprawling, rhapsodic, and rolling melodramas that span years and encompass countless characters; they're novels that live with you for months at a time. Her magnum opus, *Atlas Shrugged,* possesses revelatory and almost scriptural aspirations, posing as a new tome for a modern and post-Christian world. Rand's novels are inflexibly certain. They're not about self-discovery or doubt; they're not mired in self-consciousness; characters are not tortured souls at the whim of a cold machine, disillusioned by a world they can hardly grasp. Rand and her heroes know where they're headed, and their courage and defiance are intoxicating. She abhorred the folks-next-door characters of literary realism, stories that, in her words, read like "last year's newspaper" (*Art of Fiction* 74). Rand builds worlds in which characters don't eat, sleep, guess, or fear. It's a Romantic fantasy of titanic near-divinities—a

world rife with drama and principles, leaving no room for the mundanities of life. It's blunt and powerful in its self-assured conviction; it hits you like a surge and sweeps you along if you let it.

Like the Romantic works she admired, Rand's novels depict passionate, Promethean struggles. As Russia churned in Revolution and the Bolsheviks rose to power, Rand found refuge in Hugo and Dostoevsky. She referred to them as the "great masters" of plot and marveled at the way "the events of their novels proceed from, express, illustrate, and dramatize their themes" (*Manifesto* 86). Rand asserted the idea that conflict-oriented, plot-driven, purposeful pursuit defines not just Romantic literature, but all good literature. Applying these principles, she dubbed her literary approach Romantic-Realism. At root, she idolized the Romantics' dramatic ruction— "an atmosphere of men intoxicated by the discovery of freedom, with all the ancient strongholds of tyranny—of church, state, monarchy, feudalism— crumbling around them" (*Manifesto* 103). These were individuals who rejected the ostensible medieval creed of ignorance and stood alone against feudal and monarchical oppression, men and women who would have renounced the gospel of conformity championed by twentieth-century collectivism. While the era had changed, Romantic principles had not. As the new century flooded in, Tsars became Bolsheviks and Kaisers became fascists, but Rand saw no difference in their desires, no difference in their tyranny.

Rand was wrought in a society beset with the persecution and despotism of the Soviets' boot-on-face regime. She knew only too well the fragility of life and that world we cherish must be fought for, claimed, and uplifted, or else we'll see it taken away. To put it simply, she believed in the sanctity of life and the individual. It's a theme contained in the harrowing final words of Irina Dunaeva, a minor character from Rand's first novel *We the Living*:

> There's your life. You begin it, feeling that it's something so precious and rare, so beautiful that it's like a sacred treasure. Now it's over, and it doesn't make any difference to anyone, and it isn't that they are indifferent, it's just that they don't know, they don't know what it means, that treasure of mine.... (332)

In spirit, Rand was always the undefeated, un-martyred Romantic, but her focus was never retrospective. She was untouched by preindustrial nostalgia or cultural and artistic orthodoxy. Longing for the nineteenth-century milieu or medieval innocence was tired and dry, the kind of unexpressive mimicry Rand abhorred. She was not concerned with tales of the feudal peasant or the dynamics of Victorian aristocracy. Her novels depict the essential Hugo-esque struggle—from darkness to light, from sewer to palace—but they place this conflict in a new context, one that is definitively modern and topically twentieth-century. In her own words: "the values I deal with pertain to this earth and to the basic problems of this era" (*We the Living* xi).

Randian heroes are impassioned, exalted, and like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, lonely among the herd of men. The antagonists—both structural and individual—embody the social and ideological mores of Rand's time—altruism for instance. Her enemies weren't chambered in jeweled palaces, but wore leather jackets and swung a sickle; they were billeted in geometric housing and enshrined in gloomy barracks for the new Bolshevik worker. The tyranny Rand saw in her own era was not feudal or religious as it had been in centuries past— it was now artistic, philosophical, and collectivist. She feared the parade of the anti-aesthetic and the march of aggressive, uncompromising utility. Despite Rand's anxieties, this was the ethos that hatched and defined the twentieth-century's "modern" architecture. Its leitmotif Rand called "the monotony of brutish cubes"—an unfortunate trend that can still be seen today in every housing project, motel, and college campus, UNC included (*Fountainhead* 637*)*.

While it wasn't the only aesthetic sphere suffused with leftist ideology, architecture drew Rand's special attention because of its explicit metaphysical suggestion. From floorplan to urban planning, architecture determines how man should live.[1] Should he be cramped or free? Expressive or commonplace? Inspired or benighted? Architecture has unique power to suggest and even enforce behavioral patterns. Does a barren, beehive geometry express man's individuality or his conformity? Does a concrete slab value beauty? Should man be trapped in sanitary walls of whitewash? Doomed to reductive, insectile life? Pulling levers till death and seeking nothing greater than the bigger cube next door? In a way with which painting or sculpture simply can't compete, architecture is physically dominant and inescapable. Shoebox modernism perpetrated by Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and others of their ilk is not the type of art we can simply yawn at and turn our back on. We cannot dismiss its presence as if it were merely some back-room exhibit. It has already shaped our skylines and homes, branded itself in furniture and the aesthetic of "mass production." Rand saw this early on and became apprehensive about the dangerous oversimplification of the "modern" style.

Seeing aesthetics as the premiere battleground of modern metaphysics, Rand maintained a long-standing obsession with the world of art. Though her fictional heroes are always, in some sense, creative minds, they are never struggling painters yearning for the world to appreciate their art or melancholy poets scribbling furiously in their ramshackle apartments. Kira, Roark, Dagny, Rearden, and Galt are all builders. They represent the physical construction of an ideal society, a new world carved in 3-D space. Rand was not a Romantic aesthete content to watch the world burn from solitary rooms of artistic retreat. Societies and the physical world mattered

[1] In the interest of preserving Rand's style and the elegant simplicity of her vernacular, I will use the language of which she approved: man, mankind, etc.

to Rand—art existed not for its own sake, but to bring concepts to their perceptual level, depicting the world as it could be and as it should be. Architecture, and to some extent sculpture, were the most physical, earth-bound realizations of this ideal. Building is intrinsically aspirational, and in a single word its ethos epitomizes the Romantic struggle: upward. While painting and philosophy dwell in detached 2-D representation and theoretical thought, architecture physically changes the shape of society and the world at large. Presented in tangible, knowable, concretized format, Rand's sense of life is thus laid plainly before our eyes.

Though Rand denies that her blunt idealism is a moral "propaganda vehicle," it's obvious that her motive is not merely the "sake of the story" (*Manifesto* 163). *Atlas Shrugged* is not an aesthetic set-piece presented as an end in itself. Rand cares deeply and passionately about the fate of the world, yet she rejects this as if it implies altruistic compromise. In a chapter called "The Goal of My Writing," Rand adamantly states: "Let me stress this: my purpose is *not* the philosophical enlightenment of my readers, it is *not* the beneficial influence which my novels may have on people, it is *not* the fact that my novels may help a reader's intellectual development" (*Manifesto* 162). Rand rejects concern for the world as if it's irreconcilable with her philosophy of self-interest. On, the contrary, I think Rand was selfishly and rightly concerned about the world in which she lived. As a woman who watched her life burned to the ground and whisked away in the wintry nights of Soviet Russia, Rand was fiercely and selfishly determined to uphold a world of spiritual freedom. Never again would she watch life trampled in the dirt; never again would she watch her heroes and her mind silenced by the fist of a brute. In her novels she created the world *she* desired and with any luck, she hoped society might follow in her tracks.

So the question remains: why is building the best method by which to advance her ideals? Construction, building, and architecture are intrinsically collaborative, economic, and political. Architecture necessitates involvement with a bureaucratic world—a world rife with laws, building codes, public opinion, and men in Washington. Unlike writing, there's no opportunity in architecture for Thoreauvian escape. Skyscrapers can't be built alone; steel mills aren't run single handedly. At plot level, these factors deny the possibility of retreat and force Rand's characters into a pitched battle for society, one that becomes very much a physical brawl in which the veneration of one societal ideal necessitates the annihilation of its opposite. In fact, her novels often end in the literal destruction of malignant ideologies: in *The Fountainhead*, Roark brings down Cortlandt Housing Project in a pyrotechnic blaze, and in *Atlas Shrugged,* the heroes watch from a plane as the lights go out in the West. As metaphysical abstractions like good and evil become tangibly identifiable in bridges, steel, and trains, Rand's novels provide a concretized projection of her values, "an image in whose likeness he [man] will re-shape the world and himself" (*Manifesto* 38).

Rand certainly had favorites among the arts: in painting, Dali projects "the luminous clarity of a rational psycho-epistemology" and his young student, José Manuel Capuletti, is "a man who is in love with life, [and] with this earth" (*Objectivist* December 1966); Hugo gave her the feeling of "entering a cathedral," and Dostoyevsky felt like a "chamber of horrors" accompanied by a "strong guide" (*Manifesto* 43). Architecture, however, was a field that left Rand unfulfilled. It was untouched by the true heroic spirit, and thus all contemporary and historical work seemed to fall short of her exacting aesthetic criteria. Largely, she considered architectural history to be petty intellectual theft— "copies in plaster of copies in marble of

copies in wood"—and modernity seemed equally ill-fated as the soulless cubes of post-Bauhaus aesthetics pervaded the nation (*Fountainhead* 12). The field was primed for a radical new style—one that was modern in material but Romantic, dramatic, and triumphant in sentiment. She found this reckless iconoclasm in Louis Sullivan and again in Frank Lloyd Wright, but their aesthetics were never quite satisfactory; they were too eclectic, too traditional, too boxy, and, ultimately, they proved more Henry Cameron than Howard Roark. They lacked Roark's brazen disregard for architectural customs and public opinion and ultimately, dirges for departed trends remained scribed in the walls of their works.

Though pulling heavily from the dynamic lives of Sullivan and Wright, Rand erected an architectural aesthetic of her own creation—one that was logical and precise yet more than the sum of utility and cubic efficiency. Rand's imagined architecture is organic and emerges naturally from its site; its sheer lines embody a tamed violence. Her structures are poised almost dangerously, like an explosion frozen in space, a "pause more dynamic than motion" (*Fountainhead* 1).

The Romantics were captivated by this same artistic vitality, but their style "burned itself out, choked by the blind confusions of its own overpowering energy" (*Manifesto* 103). Like Rand, the Romantics were at heart moralists; they were deeply concerned with the importance and the clash of values. Their "larger than life" sentiments, however, were inexorably beholden to old forms (*Manifesto* 107). The nineteenth century had its head turned backwards. In nearly every mode of their endless creativity, the Romantics directed their starry-eyed gaze towards the ruinous, the bucolic, the Gothic, and the fanciful. Rand found these styles to be an insufficient mechanism of Romantic feeling and often a direct foil to the Romantic hero-spirit. Instead, she

would steal the fundamental Romantic themes—life, death, morality, heroism—and bathe them in the light of a new era. She dreamt of the Romantic creed rebirthed in a gleaming metropolis where temples of human creativity would be consecrated to secular gods. Unfettered by the glamorizers of the Medieval "nightmare" and the champions of the "malevolent universe," Rand's Promethean modernity would shed the shackles of antiquity and the bleak cubes of the Bauhausian anti-aesthetic to embrace a new age: the age of man; the age of steel; the age of rapture (*Manifesto* 134).

Chapter 2

Rand and the Romantics

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> *The destruction of Romanticism in esthetics—like the destruction of individualism in ethics or of capitalism in politics—was made possible by philosophical default. . . . In all three cases, the nature of the fundamental values involved had never been defined explicitly, the issues were fought in terms of non-essentials, and the values were destroyed by men who did not know what they were losing or why.*
>
> —*The Romantic Manifesto,* 1969

Disputing the Edenic ascendancy of nature, Rand saw the world as a blank slate—a template for man's creativity. Earth existed not as a manifestation of our benevolent creator but as raw materials "To be cut [...] and made into walls [...] To be split and made into rafters [...] To be melted and to emerge as girders against the sky" (*Fountainhead* 4). Rand rejected the Shelleyan and the Emersonian immateriality of the natural world. Its savage spirit was instead something to be trimmed, shaped, and tamed to suit man's utilitarian needs. Randian heroes view the natural world as meaningless in itself. It's merely an onslaught of entropic bramble creeping across the earth, dragging us back to the sharpened spears of our past. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Dagny's failed bucolic retreat to the Adirondack cabin illustrates Rand's frustrations with the cult of Romantic nature worship:

> [...] there's nothing but circular motion in the inanimate universe around us, but the straight line is the badge of man, the straight line of a geometrical abstraction that makes roads, rails and bridges, the straight line that cuts the curving aimlessness of nature by a purposeful motion from a start to an end. (*Atlas Shrugged* 609)

Dagny's wilderness sabbatical is ruined by her restless spirit. Fording every stream, she imagines a future of hydroelectric dams; in the garden she sees stony fields to be tilled and plowed. She clears paths, re-shingles the roof, and frees the cabin from the grips of the wild. The power of nature is always something to be harnessed, yoked, tied up, and worked—it's a slave to the enterprises of mankind. While Thoreau was mesmerized by cycles of decay and rebirth in the flesh of a dead horse, Rand was captivated by the combustion of engines. Humanity was not a poison to be cured with the "tonic of wildness" (*Walden* 255). Championing the bucolic, Thoreau disagreed. He stressed the importance of America's unsullied virgin lands and found sanctuary in the simple-living past and the refreshing transience of earthly life.

> We require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable [...].We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and Titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander. (*Walden* 255)

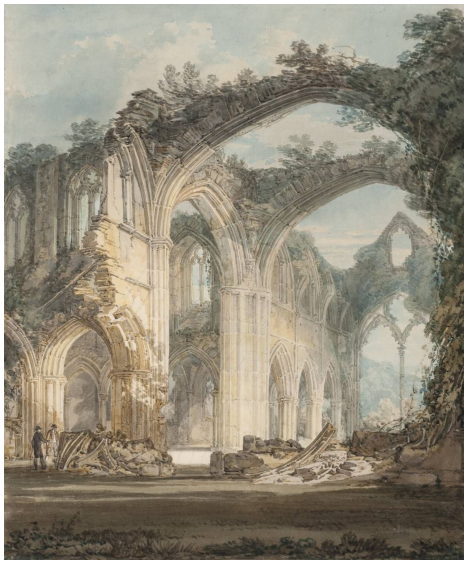
Like a skiff in the storm tossed by the waves and the wind, mankind sinks under Thoreau's titanic natural forces. There's the sense that man needs to be humbled, to be reminded that he's but a stain on the canvas of God's creation. This tendency to depict nature as triumphant over mankind, denuded of our toxic influence, or at least comfortably lording over our presence is common in the Romantic tradition and reflects deep anxieties about the existential cost of mechanization. Thoreau's reactionary skepticism heralds the arrival of Romanticism's first architectural forays—the ruinous and the rustic.

I. The Ruinous

Depicted in volatile cataclysmic instability or else in sublime transcendence of human capability, nature offered an alternative to man-made order and Enlightenment-inspired industry. With emotion as the new Romantic currency, Edmund Burke noted:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (Burke 111)

In quite literal displays of *sturm und drang*, the Romantics reconstituted the God-fearing anxieties of the medieval era and subjected man to a new lord, the natural world. The art of the Romantic era often depicts a deceptive serenity: awesome natural powers waiting patiently before churning our ephemeral works into uncobbled, ivy-shrouded ruin. Often casting mankind as the victim of this rampant destruction, the Romantic tradition harbors a melancholic fascination with images of a ravaged world.



(Left) Thomas Cole's *Desolation* from *The Course of Empire* (1836). National Gallery, London
(Right) Joseph Mallord William Turner's *Tintern Abbey* (1794). National Gallery, London

Belying the rosy landscapes of Thomas Cole and Joseph Mallord William Turner is a rather morose view of civilization. Often, their worlds seem doomed to crumble in slow death as man's mastery is erased and reclaimed by mossy growth. The conspicuous hero of these pieces is not the dwarfed men admiring the buttressed rubble, but instead mother nature, who outlasts man's unavailing efforts. Caspar David Friedrich's *The Abbey in the Oakwood* (1809) and *Cloister Cemetery in Snow* (1818) likewise observe our absolute return to nature—death—and reveal human supremacy as an impossible aspiration. Describing *Abbey in the Oakwood*, Goethe bleakly noted "here is coldness, impetuousness, dying, and despair" (Schmeid 64). Friedrich's specious depictions of mountain-top triumph, eminently displayed in *The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818), prove mere fleeting victories; the exalted human soul is quickly shrunk to insignificance amidst vistas of the sublime or entombed beneath the shroud of gnarled forests.

(Left) *Cloister Cemetery in the Snow* (1818). Formerly in Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin (Destroyed in 1945)
(Right) *The Abbey in the Oakwood* (1809). Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin

Romantic paintings of shipwreck compound this theme as men bob in the seas, gasping for breath and for life as their ships descend into the "lone and level" deep ("Ozymandias"). While maritime disaster figured prominently in the works of artists like Claude-Joseph Vernet (*A Storm with a Shipwreck*, 1754), Théodore Géricault (*The Raft of Medusa, 1818*), and, Ivan

Aivazovsky (*The Ninth Wave,* 1850), the premiere example of this imagery comes from J.M.W Turner's 1805 masterpiece, *The Shipwreck*. Amidst the dreary horizon, the bands of desperate sailors cling to fragments of their ship's debris. They wave frantically as if to signal for rescue. The sailors stretch their arms in opposite directions, calling out into the hopeless abyss beyond, but all that remains is the torrential current and the waves cresting above them. Turner removes the spectator from the typical vantage of shore-side safety and casts his audience among the bone-soaked mariners. Vernet's coastal sanctuaries are nowhere to be found. Observers cannot peer down from Romantic castles as the ocean bashes against impervious cliffs. Turner abandons the land, the rocks, and the rigid absolutes safeguarding our hopes—rescue is nowhere to be found. He leaves us to tumble in the undulating surge, engulfed and drowning in nature's epochal destruction.

While Friedrich's deathscapes elegize the crumbled arches of a once hallowed ground, scenes of shipwreck depict the instant of man's defeat and the triumph of nature. Crumpled hulls on the rocks become ruins in themselves, sticking above the waves like skeletal remains of mankind. Like Thomas Cole's *Destruction* from *The Course of Empire,* these paintings show the inexorable violence that precipitates every battered ruin.

The aesthetic of the ruinous reflects the tragic martyrdom that defines the Romantic tradition. The Promethean hero is consigned to a fate of ineluctable rot and decay, and like the disfigured Cyrano or the sorrowful young Werther, the hero-spirit is tortured and punished, and rendered powerless in an indifferent world. Romantic painters reflected a similar theme: the flame of man's hero-spirit extinguished "spark by irreplaceable spark" as his efforts prove fruitless and futile against the apathetic march of the centuries (*Atlas Shrugged* 1069). Like

Ozymandias broken in the dust, man's colossal works fade in weathered decay and even his own soul, "fastened to a dying animal" as Yeats put it, vanishes in the world's boundless wastes. Wild and insatiable, the world of Cole and many Romantic painters is "no country for old men" or any men at all for that matter (Yeats 102–103).

Modern critical reception, best characterized by Wieland Schmied, disputes this claim, calling paintings like Friedrich's *Abbey in the Oakwood* a metaphor for transcendence of earthly death. In his mind, the painting shows a pathway through the church door. This pathway is "unmistakably involved with death," but it is swallowed and ultimately superseded by the wild (Schmied 34). Sprigs of grass and the light on the horizon Schmied interprets as "isolated signs of hope [that] have been planted for the knowing eye; everything is full of expectation" (Schmied 34). Nature, seemingly, becomes the new herald of the everlasting. Similar observations have been made of Aiazovsky's *Ninth Wave*. Construing the blazing horizon as a vision of imminent salvation, scholars have dismissed the otherwise gloomy imagery.

Drawing these counter-intuitive narratives from obscure and subjective iconography seems to me, at best, risky scholarship. To put it simply, if even great German Romantics like Goethe failed to see signs of hopeful "expectation," is it fair for us to read cheery morals into Romantic paintings simply because we've noticed a blade of grass hiding under two-hundred years of dust?

Either way, Rand would have loathed "the ruinous" as the cardinal tenet of Romantic architecture. If construed as depictions of human futility, she would have called these paintings depressing and defeatist. If taken as Schmeid suggests, as pictures of nature replacing the church as the passageway to transcendence, Rand would denounce these painters as disciples of a

cro-magnon mythology. For her, the Romantic spirit meant the projection and the triumph of the moral ideal within a physical and rational world. Suffering and the eventual destruction of the hero suggested the sort of "malevolent universe" Rand could not accept (*Three Plays* 94). If the hero were ever destroyed, the conclusion must not be that man is unworthy or incapable of moral and benevolent existence in the the material world. The hero should, at worst, be "destroyed but not defeated" as Hemingway once said (103). The "ruinous" seems to suggest that ideals are impossible or at least impermanent in the material realm—a conclusion redolent of defeat.

Besotted with nature's divine and primordial power, the Romantics found the perfect escape from bourgeois and urban constriction. The energy, irrationality, and the capricious violence of the natural world mirrored their own spiritual turmoil and captured their tragic hearts. Perhaps in the ruinous death of mankind there was some eternal answer. To quote the musings of Caspar David Friedrich:

> Warum, die Frag' ist oft zu mir ergangen,
> Wählst du zum Gegenstand der Malerei,
> So oft den Tod, Vergänglichkeit und Grab?
> Um ewig einst zu leben,
> Muss man sich oft dem Tod ergeben.
>
> *Why, the question is often asked of me*
> *Do you choose as subjects for painting*
> *So often death, perishing and the grave?*
> *In order to one day live eternally*
> *One must often submit oneself to death.*
> (Vaughn 16–17)

II. The Rustic

The Romantics were at most only incidentally fascinated with the material world. Thoreau's hut was born not from lofty architectural ideas but from the same practical

consideration as that of his bean fields. His ramshackle tenement was rooted in the primal need for shelter and, to some extent, his reverence for the anti-industrial aesthetic of functional simplicity. Serving as a muse or poetic symbol, the physical world was merely auxiliary to the Romantics' ethereal and spiritual aspirations. Rand's worlds of near science-fiction would laugh at this hermitage of the aesthete; Hank Rearden or John Galt could never be content to live alone in a log cabin. Randian heroes must physically create and live amid the world they desire. They yearn to escape their own minds, to lift their dreams from the paper and see them birthed in steel. The seemingly mundane practicality of Rearden Steel, Wyatt Oil, and the construction sites of Howard Roark would have been anathema to the Romantics. Welding torches and oil derricks were crude tools unfit for their delicate artistry.

Mired in practical considerations, architecture was the metropolitan antithesis of the Romantics' materially detached, metaphysically contemplative, and reverently anchoritic tendencies. Unsure how to implement their essential ethos without muddling their abstract ideals or masking the divinity and supremacy of nature, the Romantics could not quite co-opt architecture or find satisfying motifs to successfully concretize their principles. It's a concern voiced most evocatively by Wordsworth, who writes: "Our meddling intellect/ Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:— / We murder to dissect" (Wordsworth 361). Simply put, can a Keats sonnet be transposed to lintels and bricks without ruining its essence? And what, for that matter, would it look like?

The "rustic" proposition embodies a peculiar solution. The spirit of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Thoreau, the early Yeats, and other woodland scribblers seems to hold that any incursion of the industrialized world disrupts the communion between man and nature. Too

much “meddling” and the beauty is lost, murdered even, in our clumsy attempts to turn ideas into things. Wordsworth perhaps violated his own precept, perverting the perfect ideal merely by putting it to paper, but the idea remains: like webs of gossamer in the grass, beauty somehow breaks at our slightest touch, leaving cheap imitation and artificiality as humanity’s only export. In perhaps the iconic statement from *Walden*, Thoreau echoes this concern: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life [...] and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life [...]” (*Walden* 72). The “chopping sea of civilized life” is somehow violent and suffocating and Thoreau marvels that we do not “founder and go to the bottom and not make [our] port at all” (*Walden* 73). Banal urbanity perplexes and obscures with its “thousand-and-one items” (*Walden* 73). The “essential facts” are lost and man is reduced to all that is “not life” (*Walden* 72).

The Romantics found the new industrialized world to be cruel and merciless. In the wake of factory-led materialism, they saw civilization growing increasingly inhuman. Philistine industrialists ruled the metropolitan economy and imposed ruthless efficiency. The worker-fed machine churned out ever more products for consumption in a ceaseless stream of desirable novelty. Thoreau warned of this obsession and advocated rustic minimalism, but like a snake devouring its own tail, society was trapped in an insatiable consumption, doomed to self-destruction and spiritual decay.

Removed from his natural habitat, man had been enslaved to a homogenous, routinized, and unfulfilling existence. Renouncing the material world, many Romantics sought artistic solitude in one form or another. The “marrow of life” would never be found in the halls of

mansions or the smoggy alleys of industrialized cities. Wordsworth pronounces this creed in *The Tables Turned*:

> Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
> Come, hear the woodland linnet,
> How sweet his music! on my life,
> There's more of wisdom in it.
> [...]
> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can.
> (9-12, 19-22)

Thoreau, Wordsworth, and others wanted to "live deep" and wander the "sylvan Wye" for the sake of discovery and creativity ("Tintern Abbey" line 57). Nature's vernal woods were a salve for the troubled soul and the source of all wisdom. When the Kendal and Windermere Railway threatened to violate his "temples of Nature," Wordsworth responded with a sonnet in the *Morning Post* asking: "Is then no nook of English ground secure/ From rash assault?" (Selincourt 162; Wordsworth 217). Modernity, for the Romantics, was something to be eluded—something to be escaped in the depths of the Massachusetts wilderness, barricaded against behind the walls of Dove Cottage, and forgotten along the shores on the Lake Isle of Innisfree.

(Left) Thoreau's sketch of his cabin on Walden Pond
(Right) Interior of Dove Cottage

The architecture of this reclusive coterie abandoned the trappings of more ornamental styles and became the archetypal utilitarian home. Thoreau's 10ft x 15ft hovel was assembled mostly from repurposed shanty boards, second-hand windows, and "One-thousand old brick [sic]" (*Walden* 39). It had two windows, one door, and a fireplace. Inspired by Thoreau's rickety box, Yeats daydreams of a similar shelter on "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." A small cabin "of clay and wattles made" is where he'll make his home (2). Yeats imagines tending to the land and announces "Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee; / And live alone in the bee-loud glade" (3–4). On the grey streets of London and the dusty roadways where he stands, Yeats hears always the lapping of the tides and keeps this joy in his "deep heart's core" (14).

By sheer proximity to divine nature, habitations like these presumably fostered a spirit of imagination, discovery, and peace. Documenting his halcyon days, Thoreau remarks:

> The most interesting dwellings in this country, as the painter knows, are the most unpretending, humble log huts and cottages of the poor commonly; it is the life of the inhabitants whose shells they are, and not any peculiarity in their surfaces merely, which makes them *picturesque;* and equally interesting will be the citizen's suburban box, when his life shall be as simple and as agreeable to the imagination, and there is as little straining after effect in the style of his dwelling. (*Walden* 37–38)

Though Rand and Thoreau would have shared ardent passion for banishing extraneous decoration, the cult of simple men in simple homes sounds awfully similar to Ellsworth Toohey's anthem of mediocrity. Toohey's sermonic words praise the salt of the earth, the everyman, and the commoner, for their lives are pure and sweet, and free from the "tight, crowded, miser's hole" of private ego and materialism (*Fountainhead* 304). Thoreau, Wordsworth, and ultimately Toohey utter a prelapsarian creed—an exaltation of simplicity. Rand alludes to this tendency in the characterization of young Toohey:

> When reviewing books, he leaned toward novels about the soil rather than the city, about the average rather than the gifted, about the sick rather than the healthy; there was a special glow in his writing when he referred to stories about "little people"; "human" was his favorite adjective; he preferred character study to action, and description to character study; he preferred novels without a plot and, above all, novels without a hero. (*Fountainhead* 308)

Like Toohey, the Romantics preach the spiritual gratification to be found in the "Grandeur of the Little" (*Fountainhead* 494). They tell of "a superior kind of happiness [attained] by giving up everything that makes them happy" (*Fountainhead* 666). They dress up their ideology speaking in vague words and indistinct feelings: "'Universal Harmony'- 'Eternal Spirit'- 'Divine Purpose'-'Nirvana,'" things that are above science and beyond sense and logic (*Fountainhead* 666). Man mustn't think; he must feel; he must believe, swoon, and pray. "The heart" Toohey suggests "is our most valuable organ. The brain is a superstition" (*Fountainhead* 312).

Randian rapture, however, is not to be found splashing in mud puddles and rummaging for tubers. If Galt or Dagny had stayed in the woods for two years there would have been a city when they left—one need only consult Galt's Gulch for evidence. Galt's woodland patch in the Rockies becomes a land of science-fiction. It's run by static motors and disguised by camouflage force-fields. Rand's worlds are governed by "men of the mind" (*Atlas Shrugged* 619). Man is the inventor and source rather than the destroyer of all things beautiful and sacred. Rand shares the kneeling worship of the Romantics but hers is a reverence for man not for nature, for the mind not the heart.

III. The Fanciful and the Gothic

Favoring spontaneity and unbridled emotion, the Romantics had come to resent the cold reason and impersonality of the Neoclassical tradition. As buildings of law and order were fronted in Doric and Corinthian colonnade, structures of fanciful eccentricity acted as a kind of

architectural counter-culture, projecting a capricious, impulsive, and often anti-industrial alternative. Its bizarre patrons yearned for the whimsical, the ethereal, and the divine, and this desire was manifested outwardly in the idiosyncrasies of their flamboyant homes. Often mimicking the medieval or the ruinous, these architectural follies reflected the mystical, irrational, and spectral worlds of the burgeoning Gothic novel.

Rife with curses, spirits, mysteries, and ancient ruins, Gothic fiction has a particular affinity for the supernatural. Emerging first in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), this genre traded contemporary fiction's satirical and adventurous conventions for more magical, transgressive, brooding, sexual, and demonic aspirations. The Gothic was thus the perfect antidote to the Enlightenment's Greco-Roman intellectualism.

A conspicuous fascination with castles, abbeys, and Friedrich-esque ruins dominates the attention of both Gothic texts and their authors. Walpole's own medieval musings began in the Gothic rooms of his home. Acquiring a small lot of land in Twickenham, London, Walpole began construction of what would become one of the first Gothic revival homes, Strawberry Hill (1776).

(Left) Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill after 2012 renovation
(Right) Strawberry Hill long gallery in displaying fanciful fan-vaulting

The crenellated parapets, the pointed-arch windows, and the fan-vaulted ceilings are all stock elements of medieval architecture. Strawberry Hill is certainly less cathedral-Gothic than the majority of revival design, but its foundations are still rooted in the Middle Ages. The battlements harken to a time of longbow castle defense, and the faux fan-vaulted ceilings are a variation on stone-arched rib vaults. In the absence of functionality, many of the Gothic structures are entirely an architectural deceit. Walpole was not fending off waves of fleur-de-lis knights or buttressing real stone arches, but Strawberry Hill's construction refuses to relinquish this residue of the fourteenth century. This sham-Gothic style is put to absurd effect in the long gallery. The wood-walled interior has no vaulted ceiling and, thus, no need for vertical fan-supports. The weight of the room's flat ceiling is already being carried by horizontal joists that transfer weight across to the walls and vertically down to the ground.

Regardless of its structural trickery, "Strawberry Hill in its new form soon became the marvel of the neighbourhood – a little later became the town talk – in a short time a theme of frequent comment even in distant parts of the country" (Warburton 21–22). There's no doubt that the popularity of Walpole's novel added to the allure of his home and helped place its architectural motifs before the public eye. *The Castle of Otranto* imbued Strawberry Hill's Gothic architecture with an ominous and sublime mystique and eventually derived popular appeal from this carnival house of horrors.

A few miles away, on the 519-acre estate of William Thomas Beckford, a similar story unfolded. Beckford, a well-known recluse, "England's wealthiest son," and the author of the Gothic novel *Vathek* (1786), demolished his father's Palladian mansion and redeployed the materials to construct the most ostentatious and reckless residence of his time (Melville 181).

Beginning construction exactly twenty years after the completion of Strawberry Hill, Beckford hired architect James Wyatt to complete the grotesquely large project that became Fonthill Abbey.


(Left) Fonthill Abbey engraving from John Rutter's "Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey" (1823)
(Right) Engraving of the Collapse of Fonthill Abbey

During the seventeen years of construction, the octagonal great tower, standing 276 feet in height, collapsed several times, catalyzing the abandonment and eventual sale of the estate in 1823 (Melville 358). Despite structural instability, Beckford's Gothic folly attracted hordes of visitors who sold out whole towns. When the auction of Fonthill Abbey was announced in 1822, the *Times* reported:

> He is fortunate who finds a vacant chair within 20 miles of Fonthill; the solitude of a private apartment is a luxury which few can hope for [...]. The beds through the county are (literally) doing double duty—people who come in from a distance during the night must wait to go to bed until others get up in the morning [...]. (Melville 315)

Growing tired of the publicity, Beckford himself remarked in a frustrated letter: "I am pestered with visitors to such a degree that I wish myself in Nova Zembla. Every morning there is a fall of tickets at my door where they lie as deep as snow [...]." (Melville 113).

In the ultimate exemplification of Romantic ethereality, Beckford's folly crumbled under the pressures of the real world. Its impossibly high tower collapsed for a final time in 1825, wreaking havoc on the surrounding structures and reducing them to the ruined rubble the Romantics so admired. Following his visionary impulse to self-destruction and perdition, Beckford had constructed an unearthly palace, a shaky castle that could have only survived in the magical realm of *Vathek*. Beckford's folly lives on in etchings and yellowing prints, but mostly, it survives in the imagination, a realm where some Romantic ideas were best explored, and perhaps, should have remained.

While they often exist in aesthetic opposition, "the rustic" and "the fanciful" share the fundamental Romantic escapism. While Thoreau retreated to the sanctity of the wild, Beckford and Walpole hid in the gloomy worlds of their fiction and longed for the feudal order elegized in the halls of their Gothic homes. Fanciful Neo-Gothic became the ode to impassioned irrationality and the rejection of the logical, the scientific, and the material aspects of reality. The machine, therefore, was the culmination of their ideological nemesis.

The shock of the new had sent the Romantics reeling. They grasped frantically for beauty and tradition in the chaos of the new coal-powered, iron-forged era. In answer, men like John Ruskin and William Morris revived the spiritual and creative integrity of medieval culture. The pedestrian realism of nineteenth-century art was the frozen image of the modernity they sought to escape. In harnessing the majesty and the sincerity of the pre-machine world, Morris, Ruskin, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood hoped to soak the old-world tapestry in a new dye, a pigment bleeding from the heart of the Romantic spirit. In the January 1850 issue of *The Germ,*

the periodical publication of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, John Lucas Tupper stresses the Romantic sentiment in his essay *The Subject in Art*:

> Art, in its most exalted character, addresses pre-eminently the highest attributes of man [...]. All the works which remain to us of the Ancients, and this appears somewhat remarkable, are, with the exception of those by incompetent artists, universally admitted to be 'High Art.' [...]. Fine Art should be drawn from [...] men or women in thoughtful or impassioned action [...] to sum all, every thing or incident in nature which excites, or may be made to excite, the mind and the heart of man as a mentally intelligent, not as a brute animal, is a subject for Fine Art. (Tupper 11–18)

Though often beholden to old forms, the Brotherhood became more than mere merchants of pastiche. They sought to save popular art from becoming ugly and coarse as "sloshy" artists "lax and scamped in the process of painting" slowly muddled the world (Rossetti 17). The Brotherhood proposed to rid "any thing or person of commonplace or conventional cast," leaving only sculpted heroes of intellect and passion and the exalted beauty of old (Rossetti 17).

Under protection of the Pre-Raphaelites, the old ways of artistic passion and splendor had been nervously transported to the modern era. If not carefully guarded, these ideals would fall to rot and septic corruption. The unflinching precision of mechanization had risen, unwelcome, from the ashes of talent and craft and doomed the world to the uniformity of mass production. Books, tapestries, furniture, and wallpaper could now be stitched, woven, carved, and printed by mechanical means. Industrialization made perfection uniform and replicable and eventually dehumanized ancient artistry. The hands of the craftsman were recast in iron and the exaltation of man became petty in the face of a more perfect machine. Invoking an architectural argument for the rejection of the new, John Ruskin's 1849 critique, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, initiates the ideology later cemented in William Morris's Kelmscott Manor (c. 1570, West Oxfordshire):

> Perhaps the most fruitful source of these kinds of corruption which we have to guard against in recent times, is one which, nevertheless, comes in a "questionable shape" [...]. I mean the use of iron [...]. I believe that the tendency of all present sympathy and association is to limit the idea of architecture to non-metallic work; and that not without reason. For architecture being in its perfection the earliest, as in its elements it is necessarily the first, of arts, will always precede, in any barbarous nation, the possession of the science necessary either for the obtaining or the management of iron. Its first existence and its earliest laws must, therefore, depend upon the use of materials accessible in quantity, and on the surface of the earth; that is to say, clay, wood, or stone [...] it will be felt right to retain as far as may be, even in periods of more advanced science, the materials and principles of earlier ages [...]. [T]rue architecture does not admit iron as a constructive material [...]. Such works as the cast-iron central spire of Rouen Cathedral, or the iron roofs and pillars of our railway stations, and of some of our churches, are not architecture at all. (44–45)

Much of the nineteenth-century's prolific Gothic and Classical revivals had been emboldened by up-to-the-minute industrial technology. Architectural artifice ran amok behind the pediments of public-minded structures like London's British Museum (1823). Here, an iron and brick frame was gilded in Portland stone and ringed in Ionic columns of dubious authenticity. Though the Museum's quadrangle would later win the Gold Medal from the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1853, this was precisely the "advanced science" that Ruskin had railed against in his book. Ruskin and his brassbound Brotherhood looked for beauty not in molten ore and coal-fired engines, but on the mossy stones of cathedral walls and in the dusty hut of the stone carver. This artisanal ethic, epitomized by the sculptor, the wood-whittler, and the live-edge timbers in the home of the medieval commoner, fomented the Arts & Crafts movement and birthed the fame of William Morris.

Abiding by Ruskin's tenets, Morris' Kelmscott Manor was deeply beholden to the materials and the methods of old. Though less ornamental than Strawberry Hill and Fonthill Abbey, Kelmscott was genuine in its antiquity. Morris loved "[the] quaint garrets amongst great

timbers of the roof where of old time the tillers and herdsmen of the manor slept" (Vallance 186). Kelmscott hearkened to the purring comfort of pastoral life and cultivated a special thatched-roof charm that Dante Gabriel Rossetti called "the loveliest haunt of ancient peace" (Vallance 191). The old house seemed to have grown up out of "the lives of those that lived in it" and Morris relished in this "thin thread of tradition" that wove through his home (Vallance 190).

Morris dedicated his life to the blood-sweat-and-tears craftsmanship of old. The walls of his home became a living art-piece as they were slowly revived with hand-woven tapestries, original floral patterns, and the warmth of man-made decoration. Reanimating the old world with his own creative tastes, Morris designed stained glass, published ornate drop-cap texts, and even penned numerous medieval fantasies replete with evil lords, castles, and adventure.

(Left) Tapestry Room Kelmscott Manor—Source: Societies of Antiquaries of London
(Right) Holy Grail series tapestry: *The Arming and Departure of the Knights*, designed by Morris & Co., c. 1890

Projecting chivalric myths, or else, a de-urbanized communist paradise, Morris' fiction seemed anxious to return to agrarian or, at least, vassalic utopia. Secluded in the countryside from the smokestacks of industrialization, Kelmscott Manor was the block-hewn answer to his prayers—a literal haven fortified against the industrial machine. Insulated by the stony

farmhouse exterior, Morris could pursue his every impulse while remaining free from the corruption of the iron world.

Though Morris and the Brotherhood did not project the radiant irrationality of Walpole's and Beckford's follies, their leitmotif was a variation on the same theme. The polluted world of industrialized life was the pure outgrowth of Enlightenment thinking and thus incompatible with the emotional, whimsical, and immaterial playgrounds of Romantic thought. Machines are not built by whim and impulse; they do not run on ectoplasm; they cannot exist in the mystical and irrational worlds of the Gothic novel. Fancifully artistic or willfully bizarre, the Gothic home was a bastion against rationalization and mechanization. United in the sanctum of Gothic archaism, Walpole and Morris knelt in reverence to the medieval age, an era governed by faith, myth, and rapturous worship. The heroes of old were pure and free, noble in birth and in life. The lord in the castle, the thatcher in the cottage, the saint in the cathedral: these were heroes of battle, toil, and solemn worship. Their lives were odes to impassioned action, a spirit worthy of imitation and the "white heat" of hero-worship "where admiration," Rand says, "becomes religion, and religion becomes philosophy, and philosophy— the whole of one's life" (Berliner 16).

While she too would have revered the sheer will and dedication of the crusader and the saint, Rand found their ideals repulsive. The ultimate medieval cause was the gospel of mysticism, the creed of ignorance. Rand would not accept an unknowable world governed by capricious laws and the fist of a vengeful lord. Instead, reality, facts, and the efficacy of the human mind were the tonic that intoxicated her. For Rand, Romantic sentiments had strict, practical dimensions: imagination—to build in the material world; reverence—to be held for man; irrationality—to be cast writhing and alone into the gutter from which it came. The Gothic

implied an ancient tyranny. Priests and lords were merchants of fear and champions of the brute, wielding authority like a club and bludgeoning the world back to darkness and stagnation. The medieval did not value the hero—it gagged and shackled him. Only in the glum shelter of a candle-lit garret could the medieval hero-soul survive. The Dark Ages lived on in Rand's fiction as the premiere expression of institutional evil. Stanton Institute of Technology, a college baptized in the waters of tradition and infamous for its expulsion of Howard Roark, is pictured quite literally as "a medieval fortress, with a Gothic cathedral grafted to its belly [...] a fragile defense against two great enemies: light and air" (*Fountainhead* 8). In *Atlas Shrugged,* John Galt marshals his thoughts to similar effect:

> Every period ruled by mystics was an era of stagnation and want, when most men were on strike against existence, working for less than their barest survival, leaving nothing but scraps for their rulers to loot, refusing to think, to venture, to produce, when the ultimate collector of their profits and the final authority on truth or error was the whim of some gilded degenerate sanctioned as superior to reason by divine right and by grace of a club. (*Atlas Shrugged* 1051)

While she found fanciful medieval facsimiles to be full of folly, deceit, and antiquation, Rand would have denounced the earnest medievalism of Morris and Ruskin as intellectual barbarism birthed in the "caves of ancient architecture" (Harriman 122). Like the Roman shrines in gardens and mock ruins in the countryside, Gothic follies were the aping aesthetic of Peter Keating dressed up in cathedral lace. Ruskin and Morris encroach more on the grounds of Ellsworth Toohey. Praising the craftsmen and pastoral laborers as friends and prophets of a better age, they echo Toohey's "homey accounts of the daily life of the Egyptian housekeeper, the Roman shoe-cobbler," and chant his dirge for the "army of craftsmen, unknown and unsung" (*Fountainhead*, 69).

IV. The Visionary

Though Rand despised the spectral gloom of the Gothic and the gaudy decadence of the fanciful, it's "the visionary" that would have been the greatest abomination by her standards. This impassioned Romantic attempt was the total release from earthly connection, an artistic, but physically impossible, conveyance of spiritual immateriality. The Romantics sought, in effect, to escape the modern world. For some this was the woods, for others it was cathedrals, and for the Romantic visionary, it was the ethereal vision.

Despite the attempts of the Gothic, the fanciful, the ruinous, and the rustic, the issue of conveying spiritual transcendence or heroic ecstasy was still a lingering architectural conundrum. Literature and painting were fine mediums for these subjects, but architecture belies the transcendent Romantic spirit by nature of its eminent tangibility. Put simply, how can feelings and spirits and visions of an unearthly kind be manifested in brick and mortar? How can architects materially embody a philosophy of material insignificance? The visionary answer lies in depictions of impossible structures or unearthly realms that could not and should not exist on earth—domains magically free from physics and practicality.

Since this tendency often evoked visions of wispy kingdoms in the heavens or monstrous structures unfit for Earth, the visionary impulse remained mechanically infeasible and, thus, bound to the imaginative world of two-dimensional presentation. Perhaps the best examples exist on the canvases of Thomas Cole.


(Left) Thomas Cole: *The Voyage of Life: Youth* (1842), National Gallery, Washington
(Right) Ibid. *The Titan's Goblet* (1833), Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC

Youth is the second painting in Cole's 1842 series *The Voyage of Life.* Though the setting changes with each piece, the voyager, the angel, the boat, and the river remain throughout. In the first piece, *Childhood*, the golden boat emerges from the depths of a craggy cave and begins its journey. An infant is cradled among soft woodland laurels beneath the feet of his celestial guardian, and the morning sun rises on the calm waters of a bountiful world. Though Cole suggests that the boat "images the thought, that we are borne on the Stream of Life," it seems also to reference the mythology of foundlings (Cole 8). The tales of Oedipus, Beowulf, and Romulus and Remus all begin with children similarly cast out into the world. Perhaps from even the first canvas, Cole wishes to distance his tale from reality and signal that his voyager belongs to a realm of myth and legend.

As he floats downstream, the Voyager enters the lush scenery of the second piece, *Youth.* The trees have grown plump on the banks, and the verdant hills glow in the golden light. Above,

an aerial palace rests like a "cloudy pile of architecture" in the distance (Cole 8). The infant from the previous scene has grown into a young man. He alone now takes the helm and his guardian bids farewell from the banks. The boy's shirt billows in the winds as he stretches out towards the "air-built castle" ahead (Cole 8). The scenery of this painting—the calm waters, the misty mountains, the clear sky, the path towards a boundless horizon—connote an idealistic purity. Cole suggests that it "figures forth the Romantic beauty of youthful imaginings when the mind magnifies the Mean and the Common into the Magnificent, before experience teaches what is the real" (Cole 8). The true Romantic spirit, it seems, exists only in the wild imaginings of our misguided youth.

Though Cole is resigned to the impossibility of the Voyager's vernal utopia and the atmospheric palace, this "romantic beauty" is still a moment to be cherished. As he chases his ethereal vision downstream, the Voyager finds himself thwarted by sheer rocks, turbulent eddies, and a dark ravine. The clouds above *Manhood* swirl in foreboding gloom and the eclipsing light turns a fiery hue. "The world," Cole says, eventually lifts "the golden veil of early life," but we feel "deep and abiding sorrow" as our Romantic dreams are frustrated and tortured by the constraints of our mundane lives (Cole 8). As the figure of *Manhood* is pulled to his doom by the whirling current, demon forms gather in the heavens. These figures of "Suicide, Intemperance, and Murder" assail the voyager in his moment of desperation and seem to imply that a life devoid of its youthful ideals is destined only for madness and despair (Cole 8).

Cole's ghostly palace is surely no structure fit for this planet, yet this is his vision of the youthful Romantic spirit. Ringed with Grecian columns and topped with an almost Middle-Eastern dome, it looks part Taj Mahal, part architectural snowglobe. Dominating nearly

half the sky, the structure extends endlessly backwards into the horizon and dwarfs the mountains that lie beneath. As Cole's Voyager is cast down to the solemn oceans of eternity, it seems that these vast and quixotic aspirations can only survive our reckless travels if cloistered in the mind, or frozen in the still image of art.

In a more mythic iteration of the "visionary," Cole's *Titan's Goblet* depicts a massive chalice, presumably a relic of Mt. Othrys and the era of the titans. Although itself not exactly architectural, the structure sustains a small society around its rim and a sailing community within its brimming basin. Amidst the barren mountains, the preternatural goblet nurtures mankind. Temples and forests line its circumference and visitors might roam miles in the woods before watching the setting sun from the edge of this ringed fairy-land. Pouring waters down to the ground, the goblet is the fountainhead of life and prosperity in the region. Beneath the tower-like structure, a small port-city basks in the goblet's streams while ships crawl like ants about the base.

Much like the white palace of *Youth*, the goblet depicts a supernatural haven, a fantasy of decadent fecundity where man and his dreams flourish in Arcadian freedom. Here, as never before, man is unbound; his imagination and spirit set free by Cole's unearthly realms. *Youth* and *Titan's Goblet* are moments of exaltation and visions of the "highest moral concepts of our language"—ecstasy, reverence, transcendence—but Cole has trapped these feelings in a world beyond man and his creations (*Anthem* 7). Rand rejects the implied notion that ennoblement depends on mythic titans and divine castles.

Rapture was thought to be found in nature, in the cabin, in the medieval castle and the fanciful folly, but renouncing them all, the "visionary" gives up the chase. It concludes that the

answer is not for or of this Earth. We must cast our eyes upward to the skies or retreat to the boundless worlds within our minds. Only there can we keep the "golden veil" about our eyes.

As Leonard Peikoff suggests in the introduction to *Anthem*, Rand knew that the Romantic spirit must have a "referent in reality" (7). "[The] highest level of man's emotions" Peikoff says "[must] be redeemed from the murk of mysticism and redirected at its proper object: man" (*Anthem* 7). Art should not enshrine the wispy, the impossible, and the hopeless. It must not concern itself with kingdoms in heaven and goblets of the gods. It must sanctify the realm of man and depict "the full, immediate, concrete reality of his distant goals" (*Manifesto* 170). It should inspire not defeat; it should be "like a beacon raised over the crossroads of the world, saying 'This is possible'" (*Manifesto* 170). Instead, Cole taunts us. Like his Voyager, we reach out, stretching full-length towards our dreams on the horizon, but at our lightest touch it slips through our fingers, like so much water in our hands. Cole's vision is a world in which dreams cannot be actualized, ideals can never escape the canvas, and paradise can exist only in mythic lands. This was precisely the self-abasing view of man which Rand strove to purge. Her Romantic Realism "claimed for man and his ego the sacred respect" that is "[due] to life on earth" (*Anthem* 7). In a single act, she lifted man from the "hopeless swamps of the not-quite, the not-yet, and the not-at-all" and delivered his dreams to the living world. Like the scene from *The Fountainhead* with Roark and the boy on the bicycle, she desired to give man "the courage to face a lifetime" (*Fountainhead* 530). Her philosophy was an anthem for mankind, preserved in words that can never die: "Do not let the hero in your soul perish [...].The world you desire can be won. It exists, it is real, it is possible, it's yours" (*Atlas Shrugged* 1069).

Rand and the Twentieth Century

Rand's exultation of man and his creations did not begin, as one might expect, in New York City's bustling concrete jungle. Her love for smokestacks and furnaces took hold at a time when she was still Alissa Rosenbaum, a relatively bourgeois Russian Jew raised in the revolutionary milieu of St. Petersburg. The technologically backward Russian Empire had provided Rand little experience of the industrial revolution's toxic excess. Cities clouded in black soot and workers smeared in factory muck had yet to taint the stately travertine of her city. As Anne Heller notes in her biography *Ayn Rand and the World She Made,* "An intractable tendency lay embedded deep in Russia's heart: to hold fast to its semi-Asiatic, feudal, Byzantine Christian, anti-Western past" (23). Travelling by foot and horse-and-cart to the agrarian Crimea, Rand had seen first-hand the "rocky terrain, broken shoes, hunger, darkness, [and] terror" of the villatic world (Heller 34). After centuries of Tsarist serfdom and the frigid temperatures of a seed-hostile climate, citizens like Rand saw industry as the path to Russian prosperity. Mechanization was a force that might electrify the economy, finally placing Russia on equal plane with the superpowers of the world.

A similar theme traced itself in the formative ideas of young Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the black-mustached author of Italy's nascent cult of masculinity. Suffering from a similarly stunted industrial economy, citizens of Italy rallied behind Marinetti's new movement, aptly named "Futurism." This part-artistic part-prophetic coterie lamented Italy's second-rate status among the European powers and believed that they had languished too long in "pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep" (Apollonio 20).

World Industrial Powers - Production per capita in 1910

Nation	Cotton (kg)	Iron (kg)	Railways	Coal (kg)	Steam Power (hp)
USA	12.7	270	122	4,580	180
UK	19.8	210	69	4,040	240
Belgium	9.4	250	102	3,270	150
Germany	6.8	200	75	3,190	130
France	6.0	270	87	1,450	73
Italy	5.4	8	38	270	46
Russia	3.0	31	24	300	16
Japan	4.9	5	14	230	10
Spain	4.4	21	58	330	4

*Railways measured in total length in relation to population and total area
Data from Alec Nove's An Economic History of the USSR

Marinetti proposed a new future, one enriched by the speeding car, the "deep-chested" locomotive, "the mortal leap, the punch, and the slap" (Apollonio 20). In a crescendo of anarchist rage, Marinetti devolves to violent spasms and cries in desperate staccato "wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly!" (Apollonio 20). Marinetti had knelt at the altar of the machine. The bucolic fertility of the past was now inglorious, feminine, brutish, and shackled to the "old sickly cooing sensitivity of the earth!" (Hughes 43). Like a plague, it had to be cleansed, quarantined, and driven from the ranks of society. As Robert Hughes explains in *The Shock of the New:*

> Marinetti's enemy was the past He attacked history and memory with operatic zeal, and a wide range of objects and customs fell under his disapproval, from Giovanni Bellini altarpieces (old) to tango-teas (insufficiently sexy), from Wagner's *Parsifal* (moonshine) to the ineradicable Italian love of pasta—which Marinetti condemned [...] on the grounds that "it is heavy, brutalizing, and gross [...] Spaghetti is no food for fighters." With every reason Marinetti called himself *la caffeina dell' Europa,* "the caffeine of Europe." The name Futurism was a brilliant choice, challenging but vague; it could stand for any

> anti-historical cape, but its central idea [...] was that technology had created a new kind of man, a class of machine visionaries, composed of Marinetti and anyone else who wanted to join [...] Machinery was power; it was freedom from historical restraint. Perhaps the Futurists would not have loved the future so much if they did not come from a country as technologically backward as Italy. (Hughes 43)

Though credible comparisons might be drawn between Rand and Marinetti, especially regarding their modernistic obsessions, the Futurist's violent eroticism and the worship of the machine as an autonomous near-divinity was not the future Rand imagined. Marinetti's love letter to "violence, cruelty, and injustice" was anything but Randian; in fact, it had far more in common with the implacable sadism of the Third Reich (Apollonio 20). Technology for the Futurists was a thinly veiled cudgel; it was a blank check on riot, revolution, and societal cleansing. Marching this pugnacious philosophy to the trenches of 1914, many young Futurists died in the war they had praised as the "world's only hygiene" (Apollonio 20).

Translating Marinetti's vision into paint and the impressionist brush-strokes borrowed from Italian Divisionism, the Futurists created artistic paeans to combat and strife. In Umberto Boccioni's *The City Rises* (1910-1911), the white heat of Homeric violence burns beneath a "muscular red horse dissolving under the power of its own energy" (Hughes 44). Reins and twisted cables drag helpless men by their contorted limbs; their mangled faces stretch in tortured anguish as the orgy of battle rages on. Mankind is smudged, lost, and trampled beneath a rampage of blinding modernity. The painting is consumed by its own power, a lust that distorts the lines of reality, blurring and smearing ambiguous forms to create an energy more real and more terrifying than life itself.

The Futurists longed for technology and art disembodied from the unsavory humanity of its creators. Engines, artillery, and planes were not, as Rand believed, merely the medium and expression of man's working mind; they were an end in themselves, a strength and dynamism chased, almost maniacally, to the gates of death and ruin. This was not the world, nor the art, that Rand admired. She worshipped the cities and technology of sleek modernity only to the extent that they reflected and served man's infinite creativity.

Born on the cusp of modernism, Rand and Marinetti occupied an era of upheaval. While Romanticism remained clenched in the white-knuckled grip of the old guard, its artistic iconography proved increasingly insufficient in the new age of machinery, war, and "the beauty of speed" (Apollonio 20). While Rand merely clothed the Romantic ethos in the trappings of gleaming modernity, Marinetti was perhaps among the first to abandon Romanticism for the grim apathy of the machine. The morality and heroism of the past was dead and Marinetti, much like Ellsworth Toohey, was "willing to skin humanity to prove it" (Fountainhead 312). Emerging from the ashes of books, museums, libraries, and institutions, Marinetti was content to raze the structures of the world, tossing humanity onto the pyres for the sheer joy of witnessing a violent release of energy. Sacrificing man to this aesthetic of physical destruction and cleansing, Marinetti was merely the fascist predecessor to the Bauhausian ethic of spiritual-death documented in the collective, uniform, and unexpressive housing of the twentieth-century German worker.

Though occupying opposite ends of the political spectrum, Futurism and the Bauhaus share a grim insouciance toward mankind. Marinetti gave man the quick death of machine guns and 88s, life extinguished in an explosion for the sake of raw power. The architectural

modernists of the twentieth century killed more slowly and softly, sacrificing individuality for utility, beauty for efficiency, and aesthetic life for slow death. Corbusier and Van der Rohe starved the spirit and laid man to rest inside the blank walls of their soulless mausoleums. Though she continued her search for the heroic among this barren landscape, Rand found only glimmers of hope in "the aesthetic vacuum" of her age (*Manifesto* 123).

Chapter 3

The Moderns: Finding a Roark among Men

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> *Just as a man's esthetic preferences are the sum of his metaphysical values and the barometer of his soul, so art is the sum and the barometer of a culture. Modern art is the most eloquent demonstration of the cultural bankruptcy of our age.*
>
> —*The Romantic Manifesto,* 1969

Though the technological advancements of the twentieth century were certainly momentous, perhaps too much attention is devoted to planes, cinemas, and automobiles. While jets and internal combustion accelerated the speed of travel and cinema revolutionized entertainment, neither shaped the physical world as much as architectural design. Nineteenth-century architecture lay buried beneath a steely skyline. Though the opulence of Art Deco became the face of early skyscrapers, the purpose-built aesthetic of the Bauhaus became the most prominent of the modernist trends. Hailing from Germany and deriving from the teachings of Walter Gropius, the Bauhaus was both an all-encompassing aesthetic as well as a literal school of architecture founded in Dessau in 1925. Gropius designed and constructed the institute in order to advance his teachings. Students and an impressive faculty swore allegiance to his aggressive minimalism and established the conventions that now define "modern design."

Following the rise of the Nazis in 1933, the German arts were scattered and replaced by Joseph Goebbels' propaganda machine. Denouncing everything from Jazz to Cubism as "cultural bolshevism," the Nazis banned and burned art collections and literature (Fessenden 92). In September 1933, Hitler himself declared modernism an un-German and anti-völkisch perversion.

He insisted that the Reich must unequivocally oppose "the egregious efforts to sell us the pseudo-ecstasies of recent decades" (Fessenden 92). Never, under any circumstances, would the "drivelling dadaist, Cubist, and Futuristic 'experience'-mongers and 'objectivity'-mongers" be allowed to spread their "impudent twaddle" amidst the Nazi cultural rebirth (Fessenden 92). Fleeing the Führer's artistic purge, several leaders of the Bauhaus, including Gropius and Van der Rohe, emigrated to the United States and acquired plum professorships at American universities.

Stuyvesant Town, NYC, Irwin Clavan and Gilmore Clarke, 1942
Photograph by Michael Nagle — Bloomberg via Getty Images

Aided by the allure of their exotic European glamour, Bauhaus architects transfixed the nation with their bizarre geometry and wrested the conventions of urban design from the grips of Louis Sullivan and Raymond Hood. The aesthetic sterility of the Bauhaus style took hold in every artistic sector and purged ornament with ruthless efficiency. Soon there were Bauhaus lamps, chairs, chess sets, and telephones, all adorned with the precision of a machine-made

finish. Gropius, Van der Rohe, and the other harbingers of stark minimalism were the great forefathers of the bevel-less, monochrome, brushed-aluminum style that we now call "modern."

As the Bauhaus aesthetic gradually trampled its decadent, ornate, and less aggressively modernizing contemporaries, its teachings became concertedly avant-garde and manifested in a variety of new materials. While Van der Rohe had propagated the eaveless, rectilinear towers typical of the International Style, newer disciples like Marcel Breuer experimented with concrete Brutalism. Gradually, the Bauhaus inspired cubes in glass, concrete, steel, and brick, until the modern city was reduced to the simple geometry of a child's block-set.

Living in New York for the majority of her literary career, Rand experienced first-hand this shifting city skyline. Upon arrival from Russia in 1926, she largely found herself in an Art Deco world. The city's quintessential skyscrapers—the Chrysler Building (New York City, 1930) and the Empire State Building (New York City, 1931)—would soon tower above the world and become icons of the American exceptionalism Rand cherished. The Bauhaus of the 1930's brought more than simply a shift in style; its reptilian disregard for beauty and human accommodations inspired her eerie recollections of the USSR.

Rand watched as brick cuboids with lock-step windows were erected like rows of graves on the skylines of American cities. Mockingly, she called the style "Bronx Modern"—a phrase referring to the housing projects (like Stuyvesant Town) creeping across the Bronx, the Lower East Side, and Harlem River Drive. She railed against these "buildings all alike, with a series of windows like those in a jail" (Harriman 123). It's a fitting analogy. Jails are designed to stifle individuality: hence the uniforms, the cell blocks, the bare utility. They're designed for suffering, for fear, for the oppression of every human need and the amplification of every terror. By some

vile coup this became the accepted "modern" aesthetic, one of self-flagellation, of anguish, of penance.

In Rand's eyes, the modernist architects' use of new materials did not atone for their inhuman aesthetic. In fact, Rand would not have considered their ardent anti-aestheticism any kind of aesthetic in its own right. Rand believed that you cannot define an object by identifying its lack of defining characteristics—a blank canvas is not a style, nor is a cube sculpture. This belief informs her assessment of architecture. The virtue of new materials was the potential for innovative design. Steel was never meant merely to replicate the structures of earlier eras. For Rand, steel, plastics, and plate glass all represented the possibility of drama—towering structures resting on thin frameworks, cantilevers with nothing obviously supporting them.

Defenders of the new hive-like modernism invoked utility and the superfluity of ornament. Some found merit in the pure economy and the stripped down, almost skeletal nature of these new buildings, but Rand debated their human functionalism. The twentieth-century concept of architectural utility seemed to account only for the needs of man's body. There's certainly a place for pure unadorned utility; a hammer, for instance, serves only a functional purpose—to pound a nail. Its efficacy is measured by the degree to which it completes this one task. Architecture, by contrast, serves our happiness as well as our convenience. Unless we are to be reduced to only our bodily needs, a building must do more than satisfy simple creature comforts, i.e., provide heat, lights, and toilets. Architecture must also serve the soul. It should bring joy or at least comfort; it should express man's individuality, his needs, activities, and habits. It should treat man as more than a rat in a maze, performing only the work and functions necessary to remain alive. In her personal letters, Rand addressed this issue.

> I like your term for what the moderns lack— 'human functionalism'. The solution, however, is [...] buildings which are not plain and bare, but with a complicated, ingenious pattern and an ornament of their own, but an ornament designed for that particular structure, strictly original and not borrowed from any established historical style. Buildings *do* need beauty and ornament for their human appeal [...]. (Berliner 133)

Buildings meant for human occupancy fail egregiously if they bring only misery to their inhabitants. Boston City Hall is an apt illustration of Rand's point. Looming over Government Center, this inhuman monstrosity is a building for which dynamite would be too kind. Like a fortress barricaded against the city, it's a bunker of pillars, cantilevers, and endless concrete. Its oddly cobbled geometry looks as if someone misread the assembly manual. Its halls are subway-tiled and fluorescent-lit and look as if they might be buried below thirty feet of earth. I simply cannot imagine anyone has a cheery afternoon inside its glum walls.

(Left) Boston City Hall entrance. Source: WBUR.org
(Right) City Hall Interior

Philosophically and aesthetically Rand found the architecture of her era unsatisfactory. It was too clean, too sterile, too bereft of human emotions and ornament. But Rand didn't want simply the renewal of old tympanums. As Howard Roark asks in *The Fountainhead*: "Now here we are, making copies in steel and concrete of copies in plaster of copies in marble of copies in wood. Why?" (12). Despite Rand's efforts to differentiate her vision from the brick-box

Stuyvesant Town and the glass-box Farnsworth House (Plano, Illinois, 1951), critics still consider her a votary of post-Bauhaus minimalism. In his article "Ayn Rand: Engineer of Souls" in *The New Criterion*, Anthony Daniels quotes from Rand's discussion of form and function and responds:

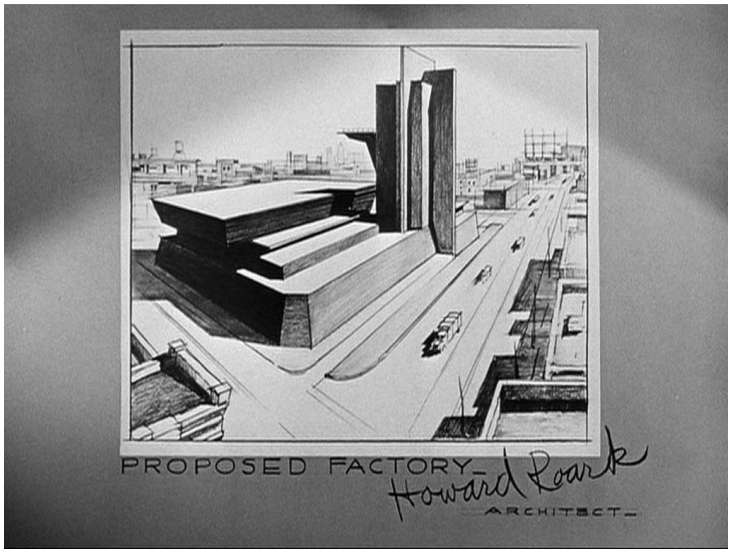
> This is pure, unadulterated Le Corbusier. Indeed, it could have been written by him. (Roark also praises Le Corbusier's favourite thing in all the world, reinforced concrete.) We all know what Le Corbusier led to; the very idea that a house "needs" things while the desires of human beings can be disregarded is one that would occur only to someone with a reptilian mind. (Daniels)

Regarding Le Corbusier, Daniels and Rand are actually in complete agreement. As is often done with Rand's work, Daniels has cherry-picked a paragraph and erected a straw-man. Critics long to locate Rand's ideas within the architectural scheme of the twentieth century, but in fact, Rand was calling for an entirely new style. Although Romantic literature had immortalized the sublime egoism and Emersonian "self-reliance" Rand esteemed, Romantic architecture had idled in Gothic mimicry and bucolic fakery. Buildings of the Romantic era, although beautiful, had failed to implement the Romantic ethos in a new and coherent aesthetic. Roark, Dagny, and Kira were Rand's solution—builders of a new world ruled only by their uncompromising vision, men and women who flouted conformity with the stroke of a pen, reclaiming Romanticism in steel and glass. Their stance was eternally that of Roark on the edge of the quarry—a figure naked and alone against the world. It was an image that remained always in Rand's mind, and a simple statement captures the rapturous spirit she loved: "Howard Roark laughed" (1).

Roark's proposal for the Manhattan Bank Company Building
Film still— *The Fountainhead*, King Vidor, 1949

The aesthetic misrepresentations in King Vidor's 1949 film adaptation of *The Fountainhead* are largely to blame for Rand's association with Le Corbusier and other architectural "moderns." Above, Gary Cooper (Howard Roark) stands beside his monolithic rectangle—a structure strangely resembling a wine-rack or mail slots. Rand tried in vain to alter the production design of the architectural set pieces, stating in her letters: "I cannot say that I like the models of the buildings, but as you know, I had no part in the choice of the designer" (Berliner 405). The film clearly appropriates the International Style. If Roark's model were stood next to Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building (New York, 1958) or his Kluczynski Federal Building (Chicago, 1974) we would have a cavalcade of commercially marketable "modern" office buildings. As the film progresses, the designs become more avant-garde, more overtly intimidating. The film pictures Roark's factory sketches as a stack of shrinking concrete rectangles. There are no windows, only massive blocks of looming, implacable stone. It's like something from a nightmarish dystopia, one that traffics in fear and revels in the shadows of the

lightless rooms. When she realized the extent of the film's thematic butchery, Rand disavowed the designs, stating that the director, King Vidor, "got pictures of horrible modernistic buildings and copied them" (Johnson 132).



Roark's proposed factory
Film still— *The Fountainhead*, King Vidor, 1949

The International style and its subsequent concrete variation, Brutalism, ruthlessly purged ersatz facades and aesthetic clutter. Addressing the "ornament disease" in his 1908 essay *Ornament und Verbrechen* (Ornament and Crime), Adolf Loos proclaimed decoration to be the primitive technique of nomadic herdsman: "We have grown finer, more subtle [...]. Absence of ornament has brought the other arts to unsuspected heights" (20). Accommodating this new philosophy of plainly rendered exteriors and an often offensively unnatural angularity, the modernists laid waste to their building sites, flattening, chopping, and oppressing the world to accommodate their crusade for pure essentialism and rigid geometry. The results were radical but somehow interchangeable. Take Corbusier's Villa Savoye (Poissy, France, 1928) for instance.

Sitting atop a flattened concrete slab, Savoye has no affinity to its site, or with any site for that matter. Place it in a city, on a heath, or in a chic suburban neighborhood—its complete lack of harmony with the land renders it an architectural vagrant, belonging somehow everywhere and nowhere at once. It's the prenatal form of cookie-cutter housing—the plague afflicting cul-de-sacs across the nation.

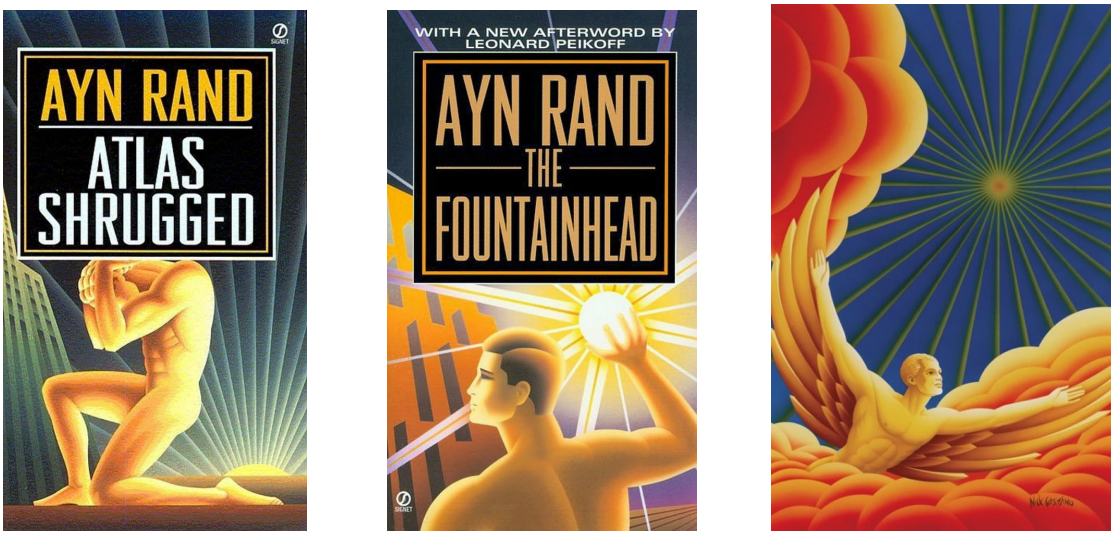
Hard, machined lines beating geography into submission are fundamentally at odds with Roark's organic tendencies. His homes are birthed from the scene of the land and flow outwards in a natural extension of the terrain. Roark's architecture belongs solely and uniquely to a single, fixed location. Roark's Sanborn House, a home by the Hudson River, is among the novel's first instances of this architectural principle.

> The house—of plain fieldstone, with great windows and many terraces—stood in the gardens over the river, as spacious as the spread of water, as open as the gardens, and one had to follow its lines attentively to find the exact steps by which it was tied to the sweep of the gardens, so gradual was the rise of the terraces, the approach to and the full reality of the walls; it seemed only that the trees flowed into the house and through it; it seemed that the house was not a barrier against the sunlight, but a bowl to gather it, to concentrate it into brighter radiance than that of the air outside. (*Fountainhead* 166)

Differing from the modernists, Rand wanted to humanize the machine, forcing its cold lines to "serve artistic and human purposes" (Hariman 148). It's an aesthetic borrowed from Frank Lloyd Wright, who notes in his book *In the Cause of Architecture*: "A building should appear to grow easily from the site [...]. Bring out the nature of materials, always let their nature intimately into your scheme" (Harriman 148). Rand saw the purest integrity in this endeavor. Rather than hacking constraints to ribbons and distorting the natural world to fit our vision, Rand believed that all conclusions and beliefs must stem from reality's axiomatic absolutes. While Roark was

the man guided by unwavering adherence to reality, the modernists were intellectual thugs forcing man and nature to conform to *them* and exist within soulless geometrical constraints.

Despite Rand's protestation, the minimalist aesthetic became inextricably tied to her name, an erroneous association that occasionally persists today as half-wit editors implicate Roark as a Brutalist or Bauhaus hero. During the early 1980s, artist Nick Gaetano finally attempted to institute a *new* vision of Rand's work—a rhapsody of the unbridled spirit—a vision of Randian Art Deco. In celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Atlas Shrugged,* a commission to redesign Ayn Rand's collected works—ten titles in all—was offered to the thirty-seven-year-old Gaetano. In 1981, he set to work reading and collaborating with both Penguin art director George Cornell and Rand's eponymous institute.



Atlas Shrugged, *The Fountainhead* and *The Romantic Manifesto*
Cover Art—Signet editions 1982, Copyright Nick Gaetano 2006

Gaetano's finished figures are statues cast in gold; light erupts from the frame and bursts in sunbeams that streak the paintings. They're sleek and elegant; the color palate is selective

without the bleak simplicity of Bauhaus grayscale. Gaetano captures a Grecian perfection and, at times, a spirit of rapture. When asked about his inspiration he responded:

> It came from my interest in Art Deco. I love that kind of design—that heroic, idealized body and structure. I didn't want to do the books with a cover that was just the story in the books. I wanted them to be more symbolic. What I liked about *The Fountainhead* was the character Howard Roark, an architect who was inspired and had imagination—an idea, a vision. (Hebert)

Gaetano's specific artistic inspiration would seem to be Lee Lawrie's 1937 sculpture, *Atlas,* the famous statue fronting Rockefeller Center (New York City, 1939). Paying tribute to Rand's mythological references, Gaetano modeled several of his covers after characters from classical myths. *Atlas Shrugged* presumably features a kneeling Atlas bracing his head and shoulders from the weight of the world; *The Fountainhead* bears resemblance to the titan Prometheus delivering the fire of the gods to humanity; and surely *The Romantic Manifesto* pictures Icarus in his flight towards the sun. Rand certainly admired these "men who took first steps down new roads armed with nothing but their own vision," but she would never have chosen Deco's tamed cubism to represent her novels (*Fountainhead* 710).

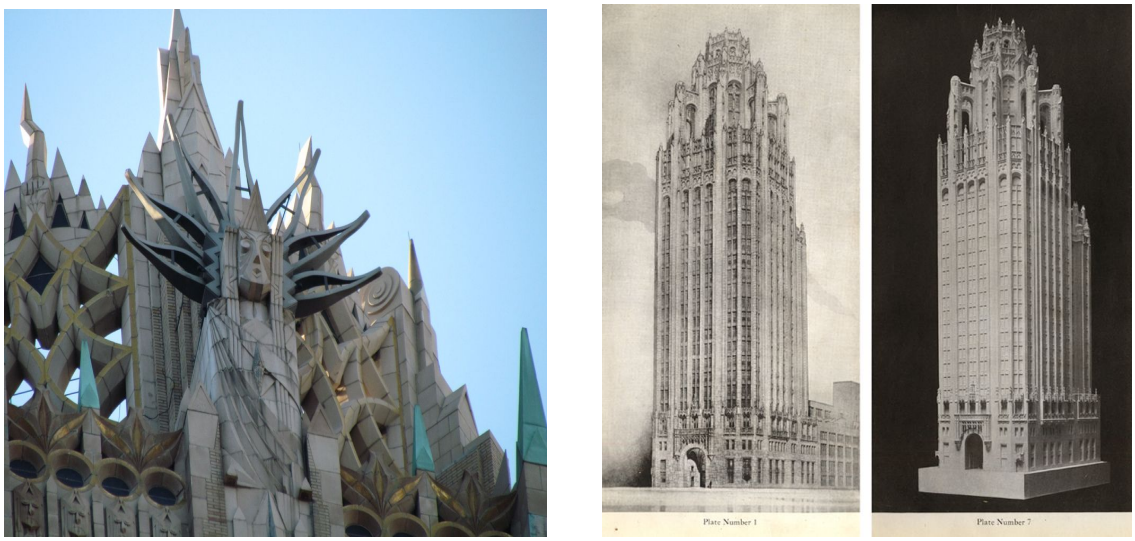
Although the new covers were sanctioned by the Ayn Rand Institute, there's no apparent record of Rand's personal opinion regarding Gaetano's art. In fact, Gaetano's commission was offered merely months before Rand's death on March 6, 1982, making it improbable that Rand ever saw his work. In her old age, Rand had also grown relatively detached from the institute. As her illness advanced, she contributed less and less literary content and retired from her work on *The Objectivist Newsletter* in 1976. With the death of her husband Frank O'Connor in 1979 and her advancing heart conditions from years of smoking, it's unlikely that, even if she had known

about Gaetano's work, she would have had the energy to wage aesthetic battles with artists and publishers.

Despite a lack of specific commentary on Gaetano's paintings, indications of Rand's likely objections are inferable from her earlier writings. While conducting architectural research for *The Fountainhead,* Rand took note of Art Deco styles. In her 1937 journal, Rand recorded her thoughts on Art Deco poster-child Raymond Hood, calling his Daily News Building (New York City, 1929) among "the ugliest, flattest, most conventional, meaningless, unimaginative and uninspiring buildings in the book" (Harriman 131). Hood's Tribune Tower (Chicago, 1925) she called "eclectic, Gothic, and none too good" while his Rockefeller Center (New York City, 1939) was simply "a mess" (Harriman 151–152). Summarizing Hood's work, Rand noted that his material was "good for Peter Keating" (Harriman 131). The material was so good, in fact, that she would later model *The Fountainhead'*s Cosmo-Slotnick competition on the Chicago Tribune competition won by Hood in 1922. Like Hood, Keating wins the competition and his "drawings of the 'most beautiful skyscraper on earth' [are] reproduced in the papers" (Fountainhead 186). This sly nod to *The Chicago Tribune* mimics their catch phrase for the competition: a contest for "the world's most beautiful office building" (Grossman). Rand furthers the allusions to Hood as Keating's plan is praised "for the masterful blending of the modern with the traditional in Art"—a phrase that might also explain Tribune Tower's boxy modernity topped, wedding-cake style, with a buttressed crown borrowed from the sixteenth-century "Butter Tower" of Rouen Cathedral in Normandy (*Fountainhead* 186).

If Raymond Hood was "good [material] for Peter Keating," Deco might well be the arch-villain of *The Fountainhead.* For Rand, Deco's flaws were unforgivable: it was

pop-oriented, prone to rampant eclecticism and, as she put it, infected with a conformist attitude of "anything goes with the fashion of the moment" (Harriman 129). As the twentieth century raged on and archaeological discoveries catapulted Egyptian and Mesoamerican designs to the limelight, Deco followed suit, adorning buildings like the American Radiator Building (New York City, 1924) and the RCA Victor Building (New York City, 1931) with chic filigree decoration, sunburst patterns, and Aztec figureheads.



The RCA Victor Building (now The General Electric Building) and Tribune Tower
Source: Emilio Guerra and *The Chicago Tribune* respectively

Though Rand called this historical recycling a "newness" that applied only to "the technical, scientific side of new methods and materials, *not* to new esthetic ideas," it's not hard to imagine why people continue to associate Art Deco with her work (Harriman 131). The civic-minded worker housing of the mid-century brought on reactionary proponents of Deco who, much like Rand, idealized the heights and the reach of mankind. Deco had become the icon of robber barons and domineering plutocrats—its shining obelisks symbolized the early nineteenth century's sexiness, glamor, and audacity. Buildings like the Chrysler (New York City, 1930)

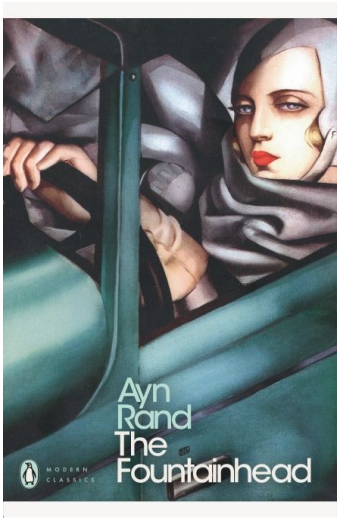
were the picture of industrial might and a shameless, stylized decadence. The spirit of Art Deco defied gravity, reaching higher than ever before to conquer the heavens above. It's a spirit that, at distance, sounds quite Randian.

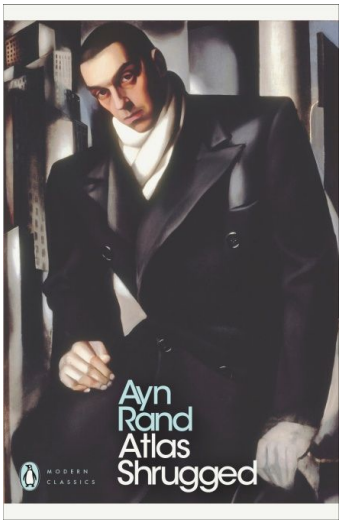
Like the Rearden Metal chain that Hank Rearden gifts to Dagny Taggart, Art Deco had an alluring dual appeal: it was lavish yet clean and almost industrial. It's a peculiar elegance that resonated with the Randian tycoons of the real world. The most attractive example is the life of Walter Chrysler. Like d'Anconia in the mines and Taggart on the track, Chrysler started as a machinist before founding the company that completed the American automotive "Big Three." Belonging as he did to an era of unchecked industrialism and pride for the genuinely self-made, Chrysler was determined that his building be more than merely a frontispiece for straightforward commercialism:

> He wanted it tall, of course, but he also wanted it good, and most of all he wanted it *his*, bearing the sign and smell of his presence all over it [...]. He was building a "monument" to himself, his company, and American ingenuity—and wanted it to be the tallest in the sky "no matter the cost." He believed in buildings, in things, in a way that few tycoons now seem to. (Gopnik)

Curved and scalloped in its ascent, the Chrysler Building still stretches above the cereal-box buildings below. Rand was obsessed with the idea that man could chisel his name in the world if he just had a big enough hammer. Hank Rearden perhaps exemplifies this most literally: "Hank Rearden is the kind of man who sticks his name on everything he touches. You may, from this, form your own opinion about the character of Hank Rearden" (*Atlas Shrugged* 26). This world-shaping, nature-taming aspect of Deco's style is deeply Randian, and it makes an appealing case for Art Deco as the typeface of Rand's work, but the fact of the matter is, Rand found Deco to be unimaginative, sycophantic, and at times, beholden to gaudy trends.

Unfortunately, Nick Gaetano's covers and his Art Deco branding refuse to be shaken. Penguin's new line of "Modern Classics" displays editions of *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead* featuring cover art from 20's-era Polish painter Tamara de Lempicka. Her blocky, geometric, and almost square shouldered figures are set against flattened Deco cityscapes or in the case of *Mon Portait*, against the Streamline-Moderne curves of a Bugatti Type-46.





Cover Art sourced from Tamara de Lempicka's *Mon Portrait* and *Portrait of a Man*
Penguin Classics, 2007

Presumably resembling Dominique Francon, Lempicka stares out the window of her sleek sports-car with eyes that pierce the viewer. In my own opinion, it's an apropos depiction of the gloomy, world-hating, self-destructive heroine whom Rand once described as "myself in a bad mood" (Heller 113). Rand, however, would likely chastise these pieces as lacking a "rational psycho-epistemology" (*Romantic Manifesto* 41). Informed by cubism, Deco often depicts figures as an assembly of various flattened planes. Curves are cut to sheer angles making faces and forms look rough-chiseled from blocks of stone. The "angular planes" of Randian faces would seem to mesh well with this style, but Rand hated cubism and its derivatives, calling its abstract

liberties an effort to "disintegrate man's consciousness by painting objects as man *does not* perceive them..." (*Atlas Shrugged* 701; *Romantic Manifesto* 41). She much preferred the hyper-realistic figures of Salvador Dali's *Crucifixion* (1954) and the works of Spanish surrealist Jose Manuel Capuletti. Commenting on style, she noted:

> ...a man whose normal mental state is a state of full focus, will create and respond to a style of radiant clarity and ruthless precision—a style that projects sharp outlines, cleanliness, purpose, an intransigent commitment to full awareness and clear-cut identity—a level of awareness appropriate to a universe where A is A, where everything is open to man's consciousness and demands its constant functioning. (*Romantic Manifesto* 40)

Lempicka's chunky rectilinearity and shallow 1-D perspective give the paintings a feeling of compression, as if the scene had been machine-assembled. It's theatrical, eye-catching, and consistent with the style of other Deco artists like A.M Cassandre, but it's a far cry from Rand's "radiant clarity" and "ruthless precision." Deco's lines are gestural, symbolic, and again, fail Rand's aesthetic litmus test.

Disappointed with the popular architects and styles of her time, Rand turned to the reference shelves of the New York Public Library and continued her search for a real-life Howard Roark. Though much of *The Fountainhead* had been outlined by 1937, Rand still needed specific stylistic inspiration for her architect-hero. Searching for the organic fluidity of Roark's modern designs, she stumbled upon architect Frank Lloyd Wright, the curmudgeonly Midwesterner who pioneered the Prairie style and is best known for prominent structures like Robie House (Chicago, 1909) and Fallingwater (Mill Run, Pennsylvania, 1939).

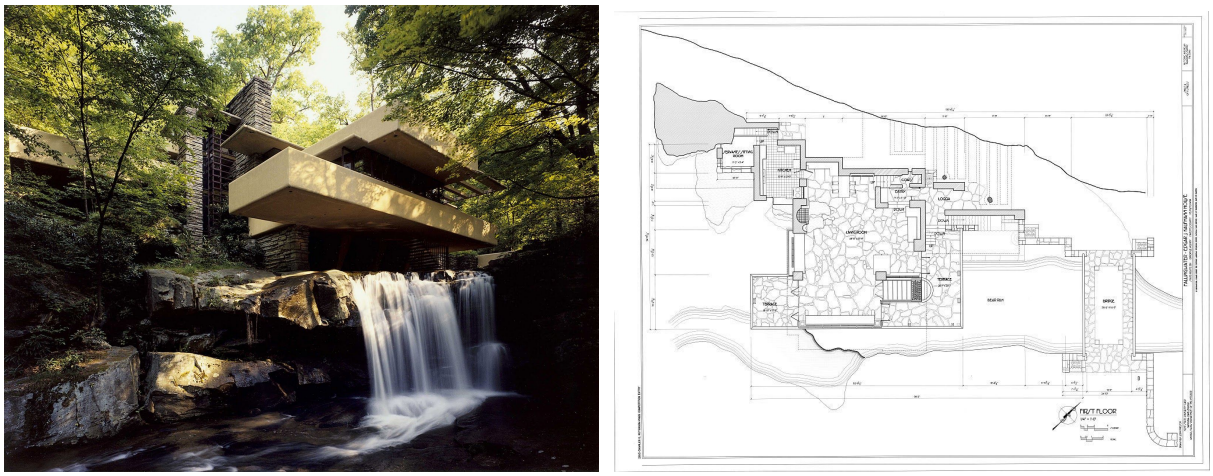
Wright first came to Rand's attention when she discovered his manifesto of American iconoclasm—*An Autobiography*. Rand adored his principles and scribbled frantic notes as if his words had come from Sinai itself.

> His ideals: The importance of interior space expressed in the exterior, "inside" and "outside" as one. The use of glass to this end. Open buildings as contrast to the "caves" of ancient architecture. "Freedom" substituted for "fear." Steel construction and "plasticity" unknown to ancient architecture. A variety of new materials—each to determine the style of the building it is used on. "Organic" architecture [...]. "Organic" ornament to express the meaning of the whole, not merely for looks and trimming effects. No more buildings of one material to imitate another (such as: steel made to look like masonry, etc.). (Harriman 122)

Rand adopted Wright as her hero and made his ideals the basis of her architectural criteria. In December of 1937, Rand wrote her first letter to Wright, proclaiming him a "living miracle" and her inspiration for "the story of a man who is so true to himself that no others on Earth nor their lies, nor their prejudices can affect him and his work" (Berliner 109). Rand concludes the letter somewhat apprehensively, stating "[Roark's] life will not be yours, nor his work, perhaps not even his artistic ideals. But his spirit is yours—I think" (Berliner 109). Rand's skepticism seemingly stems from the fact that Wright's ideas were, in practice, at odds with her visions of Roark. While Wright claimed a style unfettered by European antiquity, his homes still maintain occasional classical and Eastern homage. His stained glass and vaulted ceilings echo medieval cathedrals, his low-pitched hip-roofs and columned porticos suggest Japanese temples, and in the case of the Nathan G. Moore House (Oak Park, Illinois, 1923), Wright's half-timbering and diagonal window-muntins reveal a blatant Tudor mimicry that clashes with the later prairie modifications. Though Rand admired Wright's "form follows function" philosophy—a moto inherited from his mentor Louis Sullivan—I suspect she only partially identified with Wright's methods (Harriman 145).

Allegedly the champion of new building materials and the reformist spirit behind Henry Cameron's obsession with "plastics," Wright drew his inspiration from peculiar sources. Taking cues from the flat, rural plains of the American Midwest, the Prairie Style sprawls lengthwise

across its site. Wright's corn-fed origins and his pride in humdrum Americana are hard to imagine as the inspiration for Cameron's Dana Building or Roark's triumphant metropolitan skyscraper, the Wynand Building. Wright's style certainly became more Roarkian as his career advanced, culminating in his 1939 masterpiece Fallingwater, but he could never fully shed the warm, artisanal, wood-grain aesthetic of his Art and Crafts origins.



Fallingwater exterior and a cross-section of Wright's floor-plan
Photograph by Corsini Classic Summer, courtesy of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

Hanging precariously over a cliff, Fallingwater's variety of modeled masses resemble the "the terraces hung over the silver sheet of water quivering far below" from Roark's first commission, the Heller House (*Fountainhead* 129). Wright's wide open floor plan eliminated extraneous walls and doors, preventing labyrinthine "boxes within boxes" that kept inhabitants scurrying between walls like rats in a maze (Harriman 119). Roark's designs follow suit, slashing Keating's pillars, barricades and the "purposeless cornices, with pilasters, moldings, false arches, [and] false windows" (*Fountainhead* 132). The buildings of Roark and Wright achieve an interior freedom and a plan unlike the cell-block modernists and their "square cage out of a square pile of cages" (*Fountainhead* 238). On the whole, however, Wright's interiors retreat to

his roots and rely on a crafty and cozy artistry that fails to feel "serene and violent at once" or like "fire" breaking "through the clay, the iron, the granite, and [shooting] out to freedom" (*Fountainhead* 237, 726). Wright's avant-garde soul ultimately lies imprisoned and silent within the rough-hewn walls of his past. His designs were buttressed by fragments of convention and never approached the sinuous organics of Roark. As a particularly telling example, consider Wright's Fallingwater in contrast with this description of Roark's Filling Station.

> [There were] two small structures of glass and concrete forming a semicircle among the trees: the cylinder of the office and the long, low oval of the diner, with the gasoline pumps as the colonnade of a forecourt between them. It was a study in circles; there were no angles and no straight lines; it looked like shapes caught in a flow, held still at the moment of being poured, at the precise moment when they formed a harmony that seemed too perfect to be intentional. It looked like a cluster of bubbles hanging low over the ground, not quite touching it, to be swept aside in an instant on a wind of speed [...]. (*Fountainhead* 156)

There's a certain fragility to Roark's work; the lines and structures are stretched to maximum tension as their materials are pushed to the very brink; even the slightest miscalculation would shatter his glass sculptures. As if the climax of a violent struggle were frozen in space, Roark's buildings are a battle against physics itself; they're a wild roar of defiance and a spirit of heresy that mocks all standards. Wright's work, by contrast, feels both historically and structurally grounded. Gusts of wind won't whisk away the anchored stone of Fallingwater. His sedimentary materials are still unwilling or un-ready to commit to Roark's hyaline bubbles and his temples of steel girders.

If not in aesthetics, Wright's autobiography is certainly the firm backbone of *The Fountainhead*'s characters and plot. Roark's lack of a "social conscience," his calm insubordination, and his bark-like hide repelling the assaults of popular critique derive from

Wright's boisterous youth (Harriman 105). As Rand aptly noted in her letter, "his spirit is yours." Wright was the Romantic Hugo-soul hacking through a forest of obstacles, bloody from the strife but a look of glee upon his face. It was exactly the spirit Rand needed amongst a "gray desert of people and events that evoked nothing but contempt and revulsion" (*Fountainhead* viii). What she did not find in Wright was an aesthetic. While Rand stole piece-meal from his and Louis Sullivan's philosophy, her characters engineered these principles in a new light. Roark, Dagny, Galt, and Rearden brim with futuristic ideals and encroach more on dreams of science-fiction than the Arts and Crafts beams of Wright's wood-bound heritage.

Rand's architecture ultimately feels out of its time. She abhorred the eclecticism and stylized cubism of thirties Art Deco; she called the modernists' geometric and social conformity "vague metaphysical hooey," and even Frank Lloyd Wright never proved bold enough to attempt a glassy *tour de force* like Roark's station (Harriman 124–125). Rand's novels would be forced to adopt an aesthetic of their own and project an architectural future that might never be fully realized. From static motors to iridescent supermetals, Rand's methods and materials are often still beyond our technological capabilities. Standing on the last promontory of an age, Rand cast forward her vision and her challenge to the decades to come.

Chapter 4

Anthem: An Ode to Mankind

***

> *Ye preachers of equality, the tyrant-frenzy of impotence crieth thus in you for "equality": your most secret tyrant-longings disguise themselves thus in virtue words!*
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche*, Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

In July of 1937 Rand and her husband Frank O'Connor retreated to Connecticut for a summer sojourn on the Long Island Sound. Far from the buzz of the city, Rand spent her days strolling the beach, entertaining visitors, and slowly evolving the plot of *The Fountainhead*. Recalling her frustrations, Rand noted: "I had the most impossibly difficult time, and nothing in the story could be set firmly, only tentatively, until I had the climax" (Harriman 165). Hoping to avoid the agonizing "squirms" of writer's block, Rand diverted her mind and set to work on *Anthem,* a futuristic novel originally conceived in Russia as a four-act play (*Art of Nonfiction* 63). Written in the span of three weeks, *Anthem* is the shortest although perhaps her most beloved work. In 1938 she wrote that it was "more precious to me than anything I have ever considered writing" (Heller 104).

Anthem's semi-archaic and quasi-Biblical lyricism marks the novel as Rand's most traditionally Romantic work. This back-pocket novella is removed from the contemporary setting, conversational dialogue, and the complex internal psychology that characterized her later fiction. Rand affectionately referred to it as a short "dramatic fantasy" (8).[2] True to its title,

[2] Citations in this chapter will refer to *Anthem* unless otherwise noted.

Anthem's melodic prose has the mellifluous voice of a choir; it's a hymn to mankind that fills the soul like the power of a hundred voices ringing through the halls of a cathedral. Set in a primitive future, its imagery is torn between the innocence of its idyllic pastoralism and the emerging industry that lies (quite literally) just below the surface. Though revised after the publication of later and more popular works, *Anthem* remains a window revealing the early Rand.

As the antithesis to *Brave New World*'s dystopian technocracy, *Anthem* imagines a primitive future in which the word "I" has been erased from human language. In religious unison characters recite "We are one in all and all in one. There are no men but only the great WE" (19). Men are reduced to the bloodletting and the flat-earth science of pre-renaissance thought and only vaguely remember the wagons without horses and light without flame that reigned in the era before the ironically denominated "Great Rebirth" (19). With the old world buried beneath thousands of years of dirt and decay, a new "World Council" rules in the interest of egalitarian tranquility. Men are forbidden to be alone, to create alone, to think alone, and in anesthetized stupor the world obeys. Behind the facade of brotherly love, the World State cracks the only whip that can break the human spirit—complete control and complete conformity. Toiling from dawn to dusk, citizens are nameless and indistinguishable from the herd of their "brother men" (22). Among them lives Equality 7–2521, the incorrigibly curious street-sweeper whose journal entries reveal the story. As *Anthem* unfolds, Equality's journey from street, to subway, to mountaintop not only reveals Rand's early aesthetic doctrines, but also a powerful and lyric critique of collectivism.

In *Anthem*, Rand's blossoming aesthetics still feel youthfully unsure. As if caught between the traditional and the modern, Rand is enticed by the rustic Wordsworthian imagery of

the surface world but also by the subways and light-bulbs of the "Unmentionable Times" (19). This aesthetic tension manifests in the character of Equality. His rediscovery of electricity reconsecrates the iconoclastic industrialism of our own modernity and precipitates the story's essential metaphysical crisis: the choice of bucolic passivity under the eyes of the state or intellectual freedom in the concrete shells of forgotten cities. As Equality retreats to the wilds of the "Uncharted Forest" in search of intellectual sanctuary, the rigid lines of this choice begin to blur. Only in nature does he find the path to modernity; only in the woods does he find the city; only in the depth of darkness does he find light (30). In a Shelleyan sense, nature becomes the vehicle of rumination and discovery.

The novel opens in the ruins of an ancient subway system. Here, in the dark tunnels beneath the ground, Equality writes his first words in the dim glow of a single candle. Equality relates that he first discovered the caverns some months prior while wandering in the weeds by the community theater. His companion, International 4–8818, stepped back from the shaft of darkness beneath them, but Equality descended. Emerging from below, Equality adopts the strange place as his own and spends his time tracing the steel tracks beneath the world and examining the "globes of glass on the walls" (54). He marvels at their "threads of metal thinner than a spider's web" and smuggles manuscripts from the Home of the Scholars to aid in his research. This, of course, is forbidden. Equality belongs to the Home of the Street Sweepers, and it is against the laws of the World Council for him to study, research, or engage in any activities outside his specific duties—namely, sweeping, eating, and sleeping. Though Equality knows "there is no transgression blacker than to do or think alone" his haven of evil and transgression entails neither guilt nor fear (1). "It seems to us" he says "that our spirit is clear as a lake

troubled by no eyes save those of the sun. And in our heart—strange are the ways of evil!—in our heart there is the first peace we have known in twenty years" (37). Cloistered in this hellish cavern of "sin" and darkness beneath the earth, Equality finds the only bliss he's ever known. In a way, this mental sanctuary recalls the words of Milton's lost Archangel: "The mind is its own place, and in it self / Can make a Heav'n of Hell [...]" (I: 253–255).

This lonely suffering, however, seems almost requisite for the Randian hero. Kira cooks half-ration millet by the sputtering flame of a Primus; Roark is forced to close his firm and chop granite under the sun; Dagny braves Taggart Transcontinental's economic doldrums; Francisco sinks his own ships and drives away the woman he loves. Rand knew that the heroes of antiquity often suffered for their truth: Prometheus was torn by vultures and Adam was cast from paradise. As Roark remarks: "Whatever the legend, somewhere in the shadows of its memory mankind knew that its glory began with one and that that one paid for his courage [...]. They fought, they suffered and they paid. But they won" (*Fountainhead* 710).

Amidst the figurative chains and whips of the routinized state, Equality's underground sanctum serves as his only respite from cruelties of the surface. Each night during the performance of the City Theatre, Equality steals away under the cover of the shadows. Three hours later, he slips into line amongst the exiting herd and his absence goes unnoticed. For months he thinks of nothing but his wires and his books and his workshop beneath the earth. Nothing on the surface commands his attention and his days are passed in quiet waiting. The Street Sweepers walk the winding roads and Equality gazes out on the furrowed fields. One afternoon, near the Home of the Peasants, he sees a girl "straight and thin as a blade of iron" (39). He watches her leave and listens as her name echoes from the other peasants—"Liberty

5-3000." Forbidden to take notice of women except during the "Time of Mating," Equality suffers from a "pain more precious than pleasure" (39). They exchange clandestine glances and in his thoughts Equality calls her "The Golden One" (41).

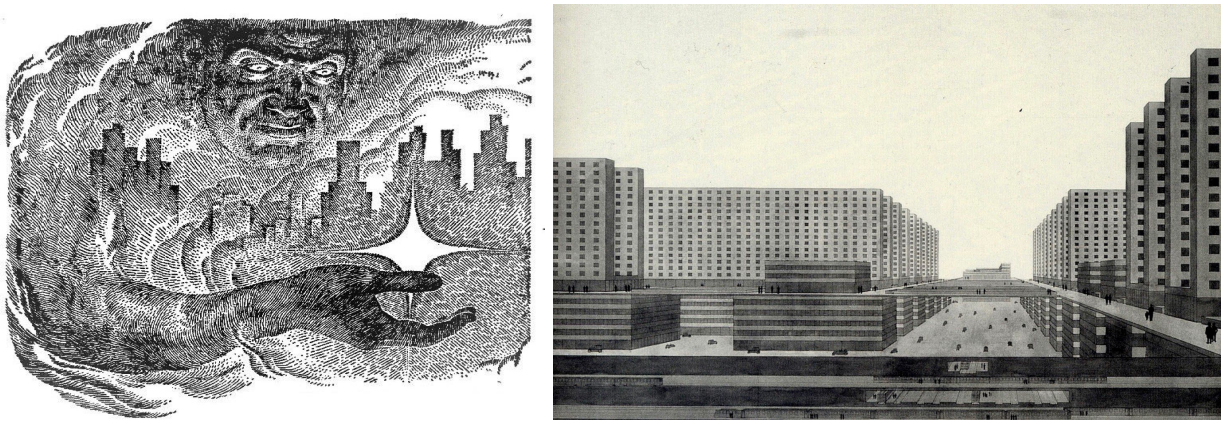
Though fields and farming certainly exhibit evidence of the human touch, the undisturbed beauty of this pastoral scene is largely denuded of the technology and modernity that Rand adored. The wild world is still free and unfettered by the presence of a civilizing hand:

> The fields are black and ploughed, and they lie like a great fan before us, with their furrows gathered in some hand beyond the sky, spreading forth from that hand, opening wide apart as they come toward us, like black pleats that sparkle with thin, green spangles. Women work in the fields, and their white tunics in the wind are like the wings of sea-gulls beating over the black soil. (38)

This cradle of fertility is an odd location for a Randian heroine, especially one with such a proto-Galtian demeanor: "Their [i.e., her] eyes were dark and hard and glowing, with no fear in them, no kindness and no guilt" (39). Liberty's stern, brooding eyes glimmer with the spirit of Roark and Rearden. They're the eyes of a hardened warrior or a commander ordering soldiers to their deaths. Her eyes are meant to witness the pouring of Rearden Metal and speeding locomotives beating like drumfire on the Taggart tracks; she belongs behind the engine of a Taggart diesel or atop the spire of the Wynand Building. The first encounter between Equality and Liberty would feel far more Randian if they had met in the Home of the Smiths and locked eyes through showers of sparks and fire as Liberty hammered expertly on a block of white-hot steel. Instead, Rand takes Equality and Liberty and moves them to society's outer ring. Perhaps here, at the perimeter, Rand imagines them farthest removed from the city, farthest from the red fist of the authoritarian state.

The city center is populated entirely by facilities of the World State. The dormitory barracks of the World Council leave men fenced like cattle and barricaded by white-walled conformity. Remembering his childhood, Equality thinks back to the Home of the Infants: "The sleeping halls there were white and clean and bare of all things save one hundred beds" (20). Years later, he's moved to the Home of the Students where they chant the anthem of the state "We are nothing. Mankind is all" (21). At night they rest in new halls identical to those that came before: "white and clean and bare of all things save one hundred beds" (21).

The American science fiction magazine, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, was the first to imagine the art-style of *Anthem's* dystopian society. In the June 1953 issue, the full text of *Anthem* was included beside illustrations by Virgil Finlay. Finlay's sketches depict the World State in the style of Bauhausian utility. The smoothly rendered, sans-serif modernity is pictured in the blocky skyline of the International Style. In the sky, a ghostly Big Brother encircles the city and peers down on the inhabitants below. As his arm encompasses the skyline, the world is obscured in the shadow of his grasp. Though this is a tempting depiction, I think the implications of any skyscraper would be inherently too individualistic and too technologically advanced for the World Council. Though Finlay's towers are stylistically uniform, the variety of heights and widths imply a freedom and creative liberty that would have been anathema to the Council's architectural monotony. Le Corbusier's theorized Ville Radieuse (1925) is a far better iteration of the intellectual obedience championed by *Anthem's* Council of Scholars. Like a sedative for the public mind, Radieuse numbs all perception with blank walls and uniform block housing. It's a maniacal dedication to order executed by the cruel hands of a zealot.



(Left) Finlay's interior art from *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* (June 1953)
(Right) Corbusier's imagined Ville Radieuse (1925)

In her bleak visions of this future world, it's not technology or modernity that Rand rebukes—in fact, these elements are largely absent from the text. *Anthem's* vague pastoralism and lyrical paeans to uncharted wilderness set the novel apart in the lineage of dystopian fiction. Rand does not believe that technological excess will doom the world to apocalypse or bring constant surveillance from a "Big Brother" state. In *Anthem*, as with her later works, it's ideas not objects and inventions that oppress. At root, it's the ethic behind the Council's architectural collectivism that Rand posits as the enemy of free progress and discovery.

After his box of glowing wires is rejected by the Council, Equality flees the town center and abandons society for the fields and forests on the outskirts of the known world. Here, in bucolic retreat, Equality and Liberty escape the statist conformity of the Council. Though the institutions of *Anthem* are soaked in Marxist idealism, nature is somehow still pure and free. We meet Howard Roark in a similar context. Distanced from the polluted world that suffocates the soul, he stands on "a frozen explosion of granite" above the still lake below (*Fountainhead* 1). Unleashed from the shackles of society, his spirit is naked but unafraid. Recalling a similar

emotion while wading through the forbidden forests, Equality feels nothing but "the song of our [his] body" among the sea of leaves (79). He relies not on others, but on the strength of his own muscle and the freedom of his mind. Laughing, he remembers his fate: "we are the damned" (80).

After fleeing from the city to seek out a new life of solitude and individuality, Equality and Liberty emerge from the woods on the peak of a mountain. Equality spies the fire of the sun reflecting off enormous sheets of glass. Nestled among the rocks and trees of the craggy summit, rests the first of Rand's architectural visions.

> And there, before us, on a broad summit, with the mountains rising behind it, stood a house such as we had never seen [...]. The house had two stories and a strange roof flat as a floor. There was more window than wall upon its walls, and the windows went on straight around the corners, though how this kept the house standing we could not guess. The walls were hard and smooth, of that stone unlike stone which we had seen in our tunnel [...]. Never had we seen rooms so full of light. The sunrays danced upon colors, colors, more colors than we thought possible, we who had seen no houses save the white ones, the brown ones and the grey. (89–90)

Though the strange stone (presumably concrete) and the walls of plate glass present like something from the portfolio of Mies Van der Rohe, the house is also colorful and intimate with its alpine habitat. Perhaps designed by a Roark in some distant past, the house appears to extrude from the rocks, emerging from the trees and the mountaintop as a man-made extension of the earth. It's a feat of impressive engineering and undoubtedly more complex than the chunky geometry of twentieth-century modernism. Neither Rand nor Roark would have scaled a mountain to place a mere glass box at the summit. The setting demands an imposing silhouette, a dramatic structure befitting such a sublime scene.

Taking up residence in this bulwark of the old world, Equality finds walls of bookshelves among the spacious rooms. Approaching the strange square stacks he marvels at the "hard shells of cloth and leather; and the letters on their pages [that] were so small and so even [...]" (91). He longs for the secrets hidden beneath the dust of the centuries, the "secret our heart has understood and yet will not reveal to us" (91). Like Shelley gazing upon Mont Blanc, the miracles of the world are revealed to Equality as he uncovers the mysteries of the mountaintop. In rapturous trance, he lifts his head and arms to the sky and recites his holy words "I will it!" (95).

Though the location of Equality's transcendence is the same as Shelley's *Mont Blanc* and Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, Rand makes a key distinction. Equality is not bewitched by ethereal powers whispering "fast influencings" from misty caverns ("Mont Blanc" 38). He's not elevated to his "own separate fantasy" by forces that exceed his own mind ("Mont Blanc" 36). While Shelley passively "renders and receives," Equality actively discovers the miracle of his own mind, and in the "temple of his spirit," he sees the face of "god, this one word: 'I' " ("Mont Blanc" 38; *Anthem* 97). Enshrining man as the object of reverence and worship, Rand owes no fealty to spiritual and heavenly lords— she kneels only at the door to her own temple. She pays no tribute to "secret springs" or the "Dizzy Ravine" as the basis of her intellect. "The everlasting universe of things/ [flowing] through the mind" does not inspire her soul. For Rand, it is not the "feeble brook" that lends "the source of human thought"; it is man who gives the world meaning. As Equality muses at the summit, "It is my eyes which see, and the sight of my eyes grants beauty to the earth. It is my ears which hear, and the hearing of my ears gives its song to the world. It is my mind which thinks, and the judgement of my mind is the

only searchlight that can find the truth" (94). Casting off the divinity of nature's rustling leaves and leaping waters, Rand genuflects only to the edict of her will and the efficacy of her own mind.

As much as Equality embodies the spirit of the modernist vanguard, the aesthetics of *Anthem* cannot be reduced to the futurist simplicity of "cities are good; farms are bad." Rand was no enemy of nature, and *Anthem* is a testament to the simple beauties of the world. Equality rolls in the forest moss, falls in love in a field, and basks in the unobstructed sun atop the mountains. This frolicking boyish spirit is perhaps difficult to associate with Rand's famous heroes, but we mustn't forget that her titans of industry still laugh and smile and enjoy life underneath the sun. Rand's grievances with nature arise only when the environment becomes an affirmative value at the expense of mankind. The relationship she imagines between man and world is non-zero-sum. There's a middle ground between the blackened soot of industry and the unsullied trees of the Uncharted Forest. Rand does not want the world leveled to barren fields for reasons of ruthless productivity or left wild for the sake of Edenic purity. She believes that the world can be used, mined, and adorned by the spirit of our creativity without interring nature in a concrete tomb. Though man's needs determine the shape of buildings, his thirst for beauty, space, sun, and air, is often forsaken in the bleak halls of functionalism. In the final pages of *Anthem*, an aesthetic harmony between man and environment is imagined as a physical union. Breaking the last chains of their former lives, Equality and Liberty select new names from the shelves of their library. As Prometheus and Gaea, the mother of earth married to the hero of men, they look out on the dawn of a new world.

Chapter 5

We the Living: The Autobiography of an Idea

***

> *If a life can have a theme song, and I believe every worthwhile one has, mine is a religion, an obsession, or a mania or all of these expressed in one word: individualism. I was born with that obsession and have never seen and do not know now a cause more worthy, more misunderstood, more seemingly hopeless and more tragically needed. Call it fate or irony, but I was born, of all countries on earth, in the one least suitable for a fanatic of individualism, Russia.*
>
> —*We the Living,* 1936

As Rand notes in her 1958 introduction, "We the Living is not a story about Soviet Russia in 1925"; it was, as she liked to put it, "The Autobiography of an Idea"—a reference to Louis Sullivan's memoir by the same name (xi-xiii).[3] Though the grim details of Leninist Russia contribute to the plot and the setting, the real story is about the birth of Rand's individualism. The theme is the fate of the human spirit under the boot of killers, "the rule of brute force" over the hero in our soul, the future of the builder in a crumbling world (xi). Though she was especially reticent about her personal affairs and her childhood in the Soviet Union, Rand confessed that *We the Living* was "as near to an autobiography" as she would ever write (xii). In terse, tight-lipped admission she reveals:

> I was born in Russia, I was educated under the Soviets, I have seen the conditions of existence that I describe. The particulars of Kira's story were not mine; I did not study engineering, as she did—I studied history; I did not want to build bridges—I wanted to write; her physical appearance bears no resemblance to mine, neither does her family. The specific events of Kira's life were not mine; her ideas, her convictions, her values were and are. (xiii)

[3] Citations in this chapter will refer to *We the Living* unless otherwise noted.

Though Rand called this novel the first steps of "a very green and very helpless beginner," her words and ideas do not advance with the teetering confidence a novice writer (xi). Like the cobblestones of Petrograd, the aesthetics and the archetypes of *We the Living* rest as the immutable foundation of her work.

Despite indecorous fates in the Soviet wasteland, her three main characters are an enduring trichotomy of the human spirit that survives in infinite iterations in her larger novels. Kira is her first builder and her first undefeated hero—she's the bedrock that anchors the towers of Roark and the city rising from Galt's Gulch. Andrei is the man betrayed and crushed by the corrupt ideal—he's the broken man behind Peter Keating and Dr. Pritchett. Leo is the shattered hero, the man "who cannot bend, but only break"—he lives on in the tragedy of Henry Cameron, who cries "like a woman, like a drunkard, like an animal" (*WTL* viii; *Fountainhead* 56).

Though *We the Living* breathes the essence of Rand's spirit, its style and its vision are not those of her later works. It marches not to the tune of Howard Roark and John Galt, but to the muffled rumblings of Friedrich Nietzsche. Like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, her heroes spark and burn among the "lukewarm" slaves; her heroes rest in buoyant superiority above the "well-foddered" herd and the burdened "draught-beasts" (*Zarathustra* 114). They are the masters meant to rule; they will themselves to power; they survive among the dead; they hold the whip that lashes the fetid rabble who make their lives in "a rotten swamp, [and] a sewer." (Harriman 25). As Kira remarks in the original edition of the novel, "If one believes one's right, one shouldn't wait to convince millions of fools, one might just as well force them. I don't know, however, whether I'd include blood in my methods" (41). Though Rand later removed this passage and eventually disavowed Nietzsche's violent propensities and his brutish obsession

with “blood [and] innate instincts,” she still thought of him as a flawed “poet,” a man who “projects at times (not consistently) a magnificent feeling for man’s greatness, expressed in emotional, *not* intellectual, terms” (*For the New Intellectual* 36; *Fountainhead* vi).

Much the same could be said about the young Rand. While her later novels progress somewhat bluntly towards conceptual and philosophical expression of her mature metaphysics, *We the Living* belongs among Rand’s “sense-of-life” fiction (*Three Plays* 3). This category of her own invention refers to writing that relies on a “subconscious” and “pre-conceptual” philosophy (*Three Plays* 3). Our sense of life, Rand opined, is the source of our gut reaction, that initial feeling of disgust or awe or anger when we look at a work of art or read a piece of literature. Before we can consciously summon the reasons for our emotions, we have subconsciously made an assessment based on our accepted system of value. In essence, a sense of life is the emotional sum of our often unrealized value judgements. As Rand explains in her 1968 introduction to *The Night of January the 16th,* events in sense-of-life fiction “are not to be taken *literally*; they dramatize certain fundamental psychological characteristics [...]. The events feature the confrontation of two extremes, two opposite ways of facing existence: self-confidence, ambition, audacity, independence— versus conventionality, servility, envy, hatred, power-lust” (*Three Plays* 3). Rand does not think that Leo Kovalensky’s smuggling or the Andrei Taganov’s Communism are intrinsically heroic or respectable; rather, their actions are the dramatized symbol of an intoxicatingly subversive spirit. Describing Guts Regan, a similarly flawed hero from *January the 16th,* Rand remarked: “He is the symbol of the rebel as such, regardless of the kind of society he rebels against, the symbol—for most people—of their vague,

undefined, unrealized groping towards a concept, or a shadowy image, of man's self-esteem" (*Three Plays* 4).

This Romantic symbolism exists at the root of *We the Living* and the beautiful tragedy of its flawed men. Like Gail Wynand in *The Fountainhead*, Andrei and Leo are men who "could have been" (*Fountainhead* 730). They are the kindred souls of Roark and Galt, crushed and distorted in a hellish world. In a moment of thanks to Andrei, Kira puts it best: "you see, if we had souls, which we haven't, and if our souls met—yours and mine—they'd fight to the death. But after they had torn each other to pieces, to the very bottom, they'd see that they had the same root" (101). Torn between her affections for both Leo and Andrei, Kira is surrounded by choleric, self-destructive, world-scorning, quasi-Byronic heroes whose souls are doomed to defeat. Kira alone remains untouched by the septic corruption that infects the hero spirit and leaves the soul locked in a living death.

We the Living has none of the redeeming optimism of Rand's later novels; it's not the world as it "could be and should be"; it's only a "huge cemetary" where the living are sent to die; it's a world mired in the brooding Romanticism of Edmond Rostand, Goethe, and Byron who looked out on a sinister sky and rued the day that they were born to suffer (*Fountainhead* 337; *WTL* 445). Though Rand obeys many of the same motifs, she ultimately departs from the aesthetic of the defeated Romantic. The state of existence depicted in her novel is not her essential view of life. She did not look out on the barren snow and the bread lines and bow to the state's red whip, sobbing softly "such is life" as the lashes split her skin. Rand's heroes do not peek out on a gloomy horizon as they emerge apprehensively from a blackened cave; her theme is not the degradation of men as they wither to shabby husks and are scattered by the wind; her

vision is not an "existence where men turn into cornered animals" as they are stalked by "fear, poverty, depression, and hopelessness" (Harriman 57). For Rand, the Soviet regime exists as a direct foil and a negation of the natural state of man's existence; it is the depiction of spiritual death purely for the sake of its denunciation. Any system that forces man's mind with the threat of a gun or hitches his soul to the whim of the crowd is prolonged only by the promise of violence, and the chains of slavery.

Leo is the tragic product of this system; he is the unseen, unsung soul who perishes in spiritual anguish and "lonely frustration for the life [he] deserved but [had] never been able to reach" (*Atlas Shrugged* 1069). In desperate escape from the shackles of the mob, he drowns his own mind, destroying his ability to think, feel, and suffer. He becomes a living corpse, unaffected by the system that has condemned him to endless torture. Certainly, he is the Romantic hero of the novel, but he is not Rand's hero. Though Leo shares Kira's "intense, passionate hunger for life," it is only she who refuses to be "crushed under the senseless, morbid, suffocating conditions of a miserable existence" (Harriman 50). Kira is proud and firm in action, and internally, she is "untouched and unaffected" and "falls on the battlefield still the same individual" (Harriman 50, 56). Kira is the Romantic spirit unmarred. The picture of man that emerges from her tale is like a bronze statue towering above a field of debris. Below, a gigantic figure of the mob snarls and moans and contorts its deformed limbs as it claws at her body from the depths of some dark pit. Emerging from the strife, the statue remains somehow untouched by the bloody muck below. Though the woman may be dead, the ideal gleams like a beacon of purity and light in the darkness. Rand knew that "to sell your soul is the easiest thing in the world" (*Fountainhead* 603). Instead, she asks us to do something much harder, to preserve our

soul amidst the incoherent shrieks of the mob and the hit squads of the G.P.U. Amidst hopeless nights and a flickering flame, she asks us to dig our hands into everything we hold precious in this world, to hoard it in our hearts, this sacred thing this precious "I," and force the world to tear it from our bloody grip.

We the Living is the first wedge that splits Rand from the Romantic tradition. Though Kira dies in the Russian snow, Rand's peculiar Romanticism refuses to project this event in a tragic or defeatist manner. Rand kills her heroes but never tears them down. Though they may be shot, mauled, or mangled, but they can never be broken; they will never whimper on the ground, begging and pleading with their destroyers. At least in spirit, they always remain the heroes without "pain or fear or guilt" (*Atlas Shrugged* 633). It's not just metaphysically, however, that Kira departs from tradition. Her life also tracks the aesthetic transition from the old world to the new, the journey from clipped hedges and marble fountains to split-room tenements and bread lines. Though torn from the taffeta gowns and stately mansions of her youth and thrust violently into the new world, Kira does not resign herself to Soviet modernity; she vows to pound her ineffaceable mark on the world and rebuild its towers from the heaps of rusty scraps. Her engineering visions maintain the glamour and the seductive aestheticism of the old world without lingering beside ancient granite gates or succumbing to the Soviet's colorless corridors. Although *We the Living* often seems to be a debate between the past and the present, Kira is Rand's vague hope for a future that ultimately transcends this dichotomy. She contends that modernity could reforge the sublimity of old while evading the desolate innovations of the Soviets. By the light of a Primus she imagines towers, bridges, and a sunrise over "the steel skeleton of a skyscraper" (35). It's a world she has only ever seen in pictures and on fading strips

of film, but she promises to fight "The country. The century. The millions" for the sake of her dream. In vatic proclamation, Leo answers: "We'll try" (117).

We first learn the origins of Kira Alexandrovna Argounova in the stale air of a government office. A Soviet official turns to a clean page of a new labor book and records only the essentials: "*Place and Date of Birth:* Petrograd, April 11, 1904" (28). Rand illuminates the details:

> Kira was born in the gray granite house on Kamenostrovsky [...]. The Argounova summer residence stood on a high hill over a river, alone in its spacious gardens, on the outskirts of a fashionable summer resort. The house turned its back upon the river and faced the grounds where the hill sloped down gracefully into a garden of lawns drawn with a ruler, bushes clipped into archways and marble fountains made by famous artists. (30)

As much as *We the Living* claims to be semi-autobiographical, Rand was not raised amid the acres of lush gardens and well-trimmed grounds of this fictional estate. She lived in a relatively middle-class apartment situated above her father's pharmacy. The inspiration for the lavish Argounova home seems to stem from Rand's teenage friendship with the Nabokov family. Not far from the winter palace, the Nabokov's "Florentine-style pink-granite mansion" became a second home to Rand in the years before the revolution (Heller 26). Olga Nabokov, the younger sister of future author Vladimir Nabokov, had been a member of Rand's class since 1915, and their brooding personas only drew them closer. Their intellectual sparring continued for hours as they discussed monarchies, revolution, and constitutional democracy. There's no doubt that Rand's strange affinity for Petrograd's stately mansions harkens back to her fond memories sitting around the Nabokov dinner table.

Looking up from the labor book in the Soviet office, Kira notes the bare walls and the oxidized pipes surrounding what was once a washroom. From the smudged wall behind the

clerks, pictures of Marx and Lenin stare down at the visitors. The dilapidated house bears no resemblance to the houses of Kira's affluent youth. The presence of the State connotes only a blank sterility, like the carbolic acid that taints the air of Petrograd. Every government facility throughout the city is dull and lifeless, or else broken, rotted, and fractured by decay. Wherever the Soviets march, death trails behind them and drapes the world in a pale-red banner. The Petrograd Headquarters of the G.P.U. is "pale" and "peeling" and reminds people of a "desolate cemetery" (111). The district club of the all-union Communist Party is "cracked and crumbling in little trails of gravel" (228). Its "magnificent white balustrade" is broken and "empty holes [gape] over the jagged stumps of marble columns" (228). In the State Medical headquarters, Kira waits for Leo's tuberculosis treatment in "dim, damp corridors that smelt of carbolic acid and soiled linen" (205). In the courtroom fighting in vain to win back their apartment, Kira and Leo sit in "a bare room that smelt of sweat and of an unswept floor. Lenin and Karl Marx, without frames, bigger than life-size, looked at them from the wall" (162). After expulsion from the G.P.U. and demotion to a position at the library of Lenin's Nook in the Club of Women Houseworkers, even Andrei begins to notice the joyless deathscapes of the Soviet regime:

> It [the Club of Womens Houseworkers] had old wooden walls that let the wind through, to rustle the bright posters inside; a slanting beam of unpainted wood in the center, supporting a roof ready to cave in; a window covered with boards over the dusty remnants of a glass pane; and a cast-iron "Bourgeoise" that filled the room with smoke. There was a banner of red calico over the former altar, and pictures of Lenin on the walls, pictures without frames, cut out of magazines: Lenin as a child, Lenin as a student, Lenin addressing the Petrograd Soviet, Lenin in a cap, Lenin without a cap, Lenin in the Council of People's Commissars, Lenin in his coffin. There were shelves of books in paper covers, a sign that read: "Proletarians of the World, Unite!" and a plaster bust of Lenin with a scar of glue across his chin. (403−404)

Ominous and somehow ironic, Marx and Lenin always loom in the background of these scenes, like paper wardens keeping watch over the prisons they've created. In stone and plaster their busts are a perpetual *memento mori*, a sinister reminder of beauty and man's spirit squashed like insects beneath the red boot.

While the Argounova estate is hardly a proto-modernist or Roarkian creation, at least the opulence of Kira's past was in the service of beauty. Its gilded halls were elegant, gracious, and reflected the aristocratic leisure of old St. Petersburg, a city that "threw itself down amid the marshes and pine forests, luxuriously, both arms outflung" (223). Though granite mansions, "sparkling ball-rooms," and marble cities were not made in the style of Kira's "white aluminum bridge across a blue river," they embody a violent strength deserving of her solemn bow (7, 35). For Kira, the ancient buildings of Petrograd are the last vestiges of Peter the Great and the race of men who had stood tall and erect and claimed their victory over the world. In a very Nietzschean manner, these men had seen what they wanted and taken it; they had whipped and enslaved nature's wild spirit until it stepped like a tamed beast beside its new master. Petrograd was "a city of stone" that had imposed its will upon the green earth (223). Petrograd "was not born; it was created. The will of man raised it where men did not choose to settle" (223). Some "implacable emperor" had arrived at a marsh and created a city and giant palace, "a monument to the spirit of man"; the Soviets came with revolution and promises and turned it into a sewer (223, 226). They wrapped it in garish red and carved proletariat poems into its solemn statues. They brought weeds to gravelled walks and peeling plaster to the murals; they brought rust to the fountains and "a red flag on a stick [to] the hand of Catherine II" (226).

In bread lines and broken ghettos, Rand's communists sentenced the city and its people to die a thousand little deaths. Nibbled by rats and devoured by the lice, men rot in sickness and decay. Heroes bleed, and even good men die, but comrades like Pavel Syerov and Victor Dunaev never provide the grace of glory or the mercy of an honorable death. They want men drowning in a pool of their own blood; they want a fate like the one Cyrano de Bergerac refuses: a "supple spine," calloused knees, and a belly worn out "grovelling in the dust." (Rostand 76). It's a sentiment best described in the desperate and drunken cries of Comrade Timoshenko:

> Once, men were ruled with a god's thunder. Then they were ruled with a sword. Now they're ruled with a Primus. Once, they were held by reverence. Then they were held by fear. Now they're held by their stomachs. [...] We started building a temple. Do we end with a chapel? No! And we don't even end with an outhouse. We end with a musty kitchen with a second-hand stove! We set fire under a kettle and we brewed and stirred and mixed blood and fire and steel. What are we fishing now out of the brew? A new humanity? Men of granite? Or at least a good and horrible monster? No ! Little puny things that wiggle. [...] Little things that don't even bow humbly to be whipped [...]. There's an honor in blood. But do they know that it's not blood we're bathed in, it's pus? [...] Let the world think that you're a huge monster to be feared and respected and fought honorably. But don't let them know that yours is not an army of heroes, nor even of fiends [...]. Don't let them know that you're not to be shot, but to be disinfected. Don't let them know that you're not to be fought with cannons, but with carbolic acid! (353–354)

Rand would rather be ruled by a lord than a rat; she'd rather be conquered by a cannon than by a plague. The system Timoshenko describes is a world turned topsy-turvy. It's a city run by "double-jointed" maggots and little roaches in the dark (354). Right is wrong, wrong is right, and only the men who can't tell the difference will survive to tell the tale.

Where the Czars brought granite, the Soviets brought filth; they drag Kira from the palaces of the Kamenostrovsky to the broken garrets of the city; they raise the twisted and the vile as icons of worship and denounce man's sacred concepts as the source of all sin. Love

becomes “a bourgeois prejudice”; the individual becomes an insult to “social duty”; dreams and ambition become a danger to the common welfare (174, 159). “It’s a curse” says Leo “to be able to look higher than you’re allowed to reach. One’s safer looking down, the farthest the safest—these days. [...]. Who suffers in this world? Those who lack something? No. Those who have something they should lack” (68). This is the fundamental idea that pervades the novel: that the evil in this world makes us suffer for our virtue, that those with the spirit to dissent are doomed to be destroyed. As Andrei defiantly proclaims in his final speech, “Deny the best in men—and see what will survive. Do we want the crippled, creeping, crawling, broken monstrosities that we’re producing? Are we not castrating life in order to perpetuate it?” (389). Kira echoes this paradoxical perversion of existence, stating: “You [the Soviets] came and you forbade life to the living” (385).

While the past had at least been comprehensible to Kira, the modern Collective is twisted, macabre. It treats life like tin cans “registered and numbered [on...] a store shelf” (383). The Red army brought labor books and rations and crushed Kira’s visions of a future ruled by the mind instead of the Soviet fist. They tore the guts out of the living to “bring a new life to men” (385). They asked:What right have men to be happier, stronger, richer, better looking than their brothers? What right have men to the Sistine Chapel while others stare up at moldy plaster and dripping rainwater? What right have men to live while others die? This is the essence of the Soviet ideology: the distribution and fair-sharing of misery as the only means of ensuring absolute equity. It’s simply not tenable that some men might have murals while others have blank walls. It’s not fair that some men have marble and others only concrete. The only solution

is to purge, to sterilize, to wash it all white and leave it just as bleak as the equally arid, equally squalid basement next door. Thus arises the architecture and the aesthetic of the Soviets.

Early in the novel, Kira considers joining the Institute of Technology and remarks: “It [engineering] is the only profession [...] for which I don’t have to learn any lies. Steel is steel. Most of the other sciences are someone’s guess, and someone’s wish, and many people’s lies” (27). Kira assumes that math, tensile strength, and welding torches remain outside the Soviet sphere of influence. After all, bridges and skyscrapers can’t force her to write Marxist propaganda and sing the “The ABC of Communism” (178). As far as Kira can gather, engineering is a field free from moral compromise. People will always need roads, buildings, infrastructure, and bridges, things forged from hardened materials and impervious to dogmatic ideology. Wrapped in her uncle’s bear rug by the warm glow of the fire, the young Kira is still naïvely unaware of the Soviet regime and its treatment of mankind. She does not yet see that concrete walls and steel girders cannot stop the penetration of the Soviet ideology. Only after her expulsion from the institute, after residing in drafty, rotting, frozen apartments, after being robbed of her furniture and forced to reside in ever narrower, ever colder rooms, does she finally see the truth. Brick walls devoid of human necessities are just one more way to treat men like animals: “Just flesh. Human flesh....registered by the person or by the pound” (383).

As the “slobbering egoism of the bourgeois” is outgrown by the proletariat mob, the will and welfare of the state assume supremacy over personal interest, comfort, and autonomy (56). It is not the individual, but the collective that is seen as a living, breathing, feeling beast that must be fed, maintained, and honored with sacrifice. The fatal flaw of the Soviet ideology is that the group, after all, cannot suffer, only those who comprise it. If life, humanity, and society are ever

to be taken seriously, we must first value its constituents, i.e. the individual. Instead, the regime subjugates its citizens to the "Party" and to the needs of its "over-crowded city" (37, 41). Architecture and engineering are no exception to this rule, and they too bow to the demands of the mob. Man cannot waste space in a large mansion; those halls could be occupied by fifty of his brothers. No grand vistas for the wealthy but views of the gutter for the poor; no highrises for some and hovels for others. Man cannot build for himself—he must only create, construct, and innovate "for the Red State" (27). Lack of enthusiasm for this ideal makes Kira and her family prime targets for government persecution. They're evicted from their home, stripped of their wealth, and equalized with the standing of the common man. Much of this change is framed in residential, and ultimately architectural terms.

Perhaps the most notable changes occur in architectural and interior ornament. While her descriptions of residential exteriors are fairly limited in this novel, Rand pays special attention to how internal spaces are rendered barren and unlivable. As beauty becomes a luxury, the standards of existence are reordered in accordance with the lowest common denominator:

> She saw the changes in the dining room. The spoon she held was not the monogrammed silverware she remembered; it was of heavy tin that gave a metallic taste to the mush. She remembered crystal and silver fruit vases on the buffet; one solitary jug of Ukrainian pottery adorned it now. Big rusty nails on the walls showed the places where old paintings had hung. (20)

Before being reduced to the curb appeal of a dingy bar, the home of Vasili Ivanovitch Dunaev was once decorated by luxurious furs, porcelain china, and a roaring fire. Post-1917, his relics of aristocracy are chopped up as kindling and peddled on the street. Years of privation enforced by the state eventually bring Vasili to relinquish the old world as it is buried beneath an anti-aesthetic, anti-surplus, anti-life modernity. Entombed and decaying, the pasts rots away until

old and forgotten under a pile of rubble. In none-too-discreet symbolism, this image is acted out in the crumbling Argounova mansion. When Kira's mother returns to the Kamenostrovsky in the hopes of scavenging old furniture, she finds only "a few chairs with missing legs, a few priceless pieces of antique porcelain, a wash stand, a rusty samovar, two beds, a chest of old clothes, and Lydia's grand piano, all buried under a pile of books from their library, old boxes, wood shavings and rat dung" (38). The Soviets are not the totalitarian regime Rand later images in *Anthem*. They do not confiscate people's possessions and burn books in the street. In a manner almost more vile and corrupt, they let the corpse of old society putrefy; they wait for men to burn their worlds to the ground just to warm themselves by the ashes. Again, this idea manifests architecturally.

Homeless after seizure of their mansion, the Argounova family liquidates much of their estate, sacrificing their most valued possessions in exchange for a new home in the tattered world of the Soviets. With a handshake "after which Alexander Dimitrievitch's hand remained empty, but the Upravdom's did not," they secure a "little flat on the fourth floor of an old brick house whose turbid windows faced the turbid Moika stream" (37, 38). The Argounova apartment provides none of the luxuries or even the necessities of human life. The family enters, walking past "landings that alternated grimy doors and broken windows [...]. It had no electrical connections; the plumbing was out of order; they had to carry water in pails from the floor below. Yellow stains spread over the ceilings, bearing witness to past rains [...] strands of soot, like cobwebs, swayed slowly in the draft, high under the ceiling" (38). Leo's apartment is no different, and of his father's seven rooms, only four remain in Leo's possession. The others have been rented, and the remaining space is sliced with partitions to cut off the tenants. Again, the

Soviets have no need to actively tear down the stately remains of antiquity; the ideology they have inculcated in the masses will act on its own, creating a desolate world where the best men either destroy themselves or are destroyed by their fellow men. Leo's home, and with it his spirit, are gradually devoured by the demands of the modern world. Retreating to smaller rooms surrounded by less and less furniture, Leo and Kira are evicted from their way of life. Victor Dunaev, arch-communist and informant extraordinaire, visits their apartment, remarking: "Yes, it's a lovely place you have here. Pre-revolutionary luxury....You two are quite the bourgeois, aren't you. Two huge rooms like these" (160). Shortly after, their home is invaded by a young communist. Citizen Lavrova commandeers their living-room and their furniture and leaves them squeezed into a dingy backroom that scarcely accommodates their meager possessions.

Rand seems to argue that as the world degenerates, so does art. In fact, the Soviets are desperately concerned about aesthetics; from propaganda posters, to film captions, they're intent on reinterpreting the world through the lens of the common good. Kira and Leo encounter this first-hand at a revolutionary theatre showing the American film: *The Golden Octopus*. On the screen, "a subtitle said: 'I hate you. You are a blood-sucking capitalistic exploiter. Get out of my room!' On the screen, a man was bending over the hand of a delicate lady, pressing it slowly to his lips, while she looked at him sadly, and gently stroked his hair" (158). In this absurd illustration of Rand's theme, everything that makes life worth living is perverted by the red regime. Man's own mind, own happiness, own ideals cannot exist within their system. The value of man's own life must be shattered and dissolved. The primacy of man is overshadowed by the the ghostly, sublime, and ultimately non-existent collective. The battle Rand sees is not one fought with guns or spears; it is not waged between Red armies and White; it rages silently in the

dark between rotten garrets and stone temples, between red flags over Nevsky Prospekt and aluminum bridges in the sky, between the fist of the mob and the strength of the mind.

Chapter 6

The Fountainhead: One Man above the World

***

> *The creator's concern is the conquest of nature. The parasite's concern is the conquest of men.*
>
> —*The Fountainhead,* 1943

Rand had long dreamed of Howard Roark, *The Fountainhead*'s gaunt-faced hero with a body like high-tension wires. While the cruel face of Leo Kovalensky and the cold superiority of Zarathustra serve as Roark's proximate ideological heritage, none of these heroes were the "fount of energy" or the "life force" that inspired the idea for her break-out novel, *The Fountainhead* (*Fountainhead* 711). By the 1930s, Rand's early Hollywood career had slumped. She had recently lost her job as a script-writer with DeMille Studios and found herself clerking in the wardrobe department at RKO. Here, in the depths of literary frustration, her neighbor and fellow RKO assistant, Marcella Bannert, sparked Rand's psychological fascinations. Discussing ideas of success and achievement, Marcella remarked: "I'll tell you what I want. If nobody had an automobile, then I would want to have one automobile. If some people have one, then I want to have two" (Harriman 443). Rand noted that Marcella's source of value was not her own happiness or an absolute standard; her wants, desires, and sense of self were relative, and dictated by the ruling majority. Though this "keeping up with the Joneses" mentality had long been decried as materialistic and consumerist, Rand upended the conventions of moral philosophy, declaring Marcella self-*less* as opposed to selfish. Rand contended that Marcella had no discernable "self"; her values were merely a glorified group-think. Marcella's fundamental motivation was not "what do I think?" or "what do I value?," but rather, a redirection outwards:

"what do others think?," "what do others value?" In this manner, a sense of worth is achieved not through personal accomplishment or self-efficacy, but through a "second-handed" method in which value is measured through the eyes of others, i.e., "I'm a success because others believe it to be so." This became the inspiration for Peter Keating, a man "great as the number of people who told him so" and "right at the number of people who believed it" (*Fountainhead* 188). "Values," Rand remarked, "have no absolute existence for him; they are all relative" (Harriman 443). The spirit of Roark was eventually conceived as the antidote to these "Second-Hand Lives" (Harriman 77).

"Second-Hand Lives," the intended title for the novel, is introduced in Rand's journals with an epigraph from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> It is not the works, but the belief which is here decisive and determines the order of rank—to employ once more an old religious formula with a new and deeper meaning—it is some fundamental certainty which a noble soul has about itself, something which is not to be sought, is not to be found, and perhaps, also, is not to be lost. *The noble soul has reverence for itself.* (Harriman 77)

The "spiritual parasites" and Peter Keatings of the world have great concern for this self-reverence, but they seek it in all the wrong places (Harriman 442). As Nietzsche notes, it cannot be sought out; it cannot be found and captured like a wild beast; it comes only from within our own mind and our own soul. The second-hander "wants, from others, any reward given to human values or virtues—without possessing these values or virtues. Above all, he wants admiration (without an achievement to admire, without even giving to himself any reason why he should be admired). He wants authority, unearned and causeless; he wants to be obeyed, he wants power and the feeling of influencing others" (Harriman 442). Rand argues that these desires necessitate a final clash in which illusion rears its ugly head and bashes against the walls of reality. The

mind will always be forced to contend with its own contradictions and its own disguised insufficiencies.

Peter Keating and Ellsworth Toohey present alternative types of the second-hander. While they are both men who desire that which they have not earned and do not deserve, their aims are quite different. While Keating wants to be draped in laurelled honor, hailed as a genius and a visionary, Toohey wants only to yolk the mob and relish in the power of a whip. Establishing these archetypes, Rand noted: "Keating is the man who wasn't [the ideal man] and *didn't know it.* Toohey is the man who was not the ideal man and *knew it"*(Harriman 92). Somewhere in Keating's heart there's a respect for Roark; there's an admiration for achievement and skill that can never be shaken. Keating seeks his own glory by "riding on the achievements of others"; he's the equivalent of "the hack popular writer who makes a comfortable living by thinly disguised variations on the writings of others; the dress designers who steal from Adrian" (Harriman 442). But Keating never spits on genius; he has no desire to crush beauty and rule the broken souls of men. Though he lacks the spirit of the true visionary, Keating sees some honor in paying homage and gains "a reasonable satisfaction in [...] borrowed greatness" (*Fountainhead* 589). When he realizes that the eyes of others will never exalt his own soul and that "public favor [has] ceased being a recognition of merit," Keating is crushed and reduced to a whimpering lump in the office of Ellsworth Toohey (*Fountainhead* 589). In hopes of changing his ways, Keating confesses that he never wanted to be an architect; he wanted to be a painter. Opening his briefcase, he presents Roark with his only honest work, a set of six canvases. Gently, Roark responds: "It's too late, Peter" (*Fountainhead* 609).

By contrast, Toohey has no illusions about the "price or the purchase" of his actions (*Fountainhead* 668). He has no interest in achievement or merit. These, in fact, are the very object of his assault. He desires "an average drawn upon zeroes [...]. A world with its motor cut off and a single heart pumped by hand. My hand [...]" (*Fountainhead* 668). He speaks of masters and of slaves and "intends to be the master" (*Fountainhead* 667). The faith, the kind words, and the admiration of others bring him no spiritual joy—people are merely a tool of control. As they learn to submit, to serve, and to seek favor, Toohey's pupils become "Automatic levers—all saying yes"; the rest merely "smile and obey" (*Fountainhead* 668). Vox populi, vox dei.

Toohey's character is fated to clash with Howard Roark. As Toohey notes: "Everything that can't be ruled must go" (*Fountainhead* 668). Since Roark's soul cannot be conquered, "It must be broken," and reunited under the banner of a zero, where slaves serve slaves in an endless circle of conformity (*Fountainhead* 665). Foisting irrationality upon the world with the nonsensical poetics of Lois Cook and the coterie of anti-aesthetics helmed by Gus Webb, Toohey mixes ugliness with beauty, sense with nonsense, and good with bad until nothing can be deciphered from the blurry pool of muck that remains. Amidst this aesthetic slurry, Roark stands upon a promontory of his own creation. Buildings, not disciples are the adornments of his soul. Evolving beyond Leo, Roark is the hero who will neither bend nor break; his white plume waves above the world as a beacon and "a glimpse of something perfect, fully realized, happy, mighty, triumphant [...]. A glimpse of man that justifies the existence of man, a glimpse of an incarnate human happiness that realizes and redeems" (Harriman 219).[4] Roark is Rand's first mature hero, and consequently, the first embodiment of her mature aesthetic. He does not wish to mimic like

[4] This is an excerpt from Rand's journals, but she is quoting Nietzsche.

Keating or to rule like Toohey; he seeks only to be master of his own mind and to live in a world wrought of his own creative spirit. His buildings cherish not the slave or the fraud, but the hero in man's soul. In every action and every creation, Roark is the mainspring, the prime mover, and the fountainhead among the barren wastes. "Howard Roark," Heller notes "would so perfectly embody this rigorous code of living that he would become, for millions of readers, the consummate enemy of mediocrity and the anti-Babbitt of his age" (65).

I. Henry Cameron: The Dana Building

Scoffing at modern architecture, the Dean of Stanton Institute leans back in his chair and says: "Look at Henry Cameron....A bum. A drunkard" Flatly, Roark responds: "We won't discuss Henry Cameron" (Fountainhead 13). A "short, stocky, unkempt" architect with a quick temper and an unprintable vocabulary, Henry Cameron is the father of the modern skyscraper and Roark's only mentor (*Fountainhead* 34). Like Roark, Cameron refuses to compromise and has been cast down from architectural high-society. Though he drinks away his days in a broken down office, Cameron is the only man from whom Roark believes he can learn. While his contemporaries gawked at frescos, Doric columns, and Michelangelo, Cameron cast off the "friezes and pediments" and the "ponderous tier[s] of masonry" (*Fountainhead* 34). His buildings became "startling experiments" and "arrows of steel shooting upward without weight or limit" (*Fountainhead* 34). He was the first to flaunt the height, the beauty, and the strength of his structures' hidden skeletons. Cameron rose to fame and his buildings became a mark of prestige, power, and rugged individualism, but before the nation let down its final barrier and accepted the grandeur of a new century, the country was "flung two thousand years back in an orgy of Classicism" (*Fountainhead* 35). In a new era of eternal revivalism, Cameron sunk in the

back pages and forgotten memories of history. As the novel begins, only his steel skeletons stand on the horizon as the holy relics and the grim remains of his empire.

The fictional Henry Cameron is a rather glaring allusion to architect Louis Henry Sullivan. Born in 1856, Sullivan was a popular early modernist and the original recipient of the epithet: "father of skyscrapers" (Kaufman 1). Despite his contributions to architecture and city planning, Sullivan died, much like Cameron, in impoverished obscurity. In stature, temperament, and even name, Rand borrowed from this real-life architect-hero and often quoted his autobiography nearly verbatim. For instance, both Sullivan and Cameron attribute their downfall to the neoclassical revival spurred by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Sullivan notes in his autobiography: "The damage wrought by the World's Fair will last for half a century from its date, if not longer. It has penetrated deep into the constitution of the American mind, affecting lesions significant of dementia [...]. Architecture, be it known, is dead" (Sullivan 325). Adapting the story to her novel, Rand notes: "The Columbian Exposition of Chicago opened in the year 1893 [...]. Its architects competed on who could steal best, from the oldest source and from the most sources at once [...]. It was white as a plague, and it spread as such [...]. Cameron had refused to work for the Columbian Exposition [...]. Cameron had nothing to offer against [them]; nothing but a faith he held merely because it was his own" (*Fountainhead* 35).

Though Cameron echoes Sullivan's architectural commandment that "the form of a building must follow its function," the two architects seem to have relatively few aesthetic similarities (*Fountainhead* 35). While Cameron's structures rise "dangerously to an explosion," Sullivan's buildings feel firm, stately, and confident in their rectilinear geometry (*Fountainhead* 34). Cameron stabs at the sky with steel arrows, but Sullivan is content to pay tribute to the earth.

His structures take full advantage of a steel frame, but remain clothed in masonry and fronted in terracotta. Elaborate carvings, sculpted eaves, and decorative arched windows on the upper floors lend regality and opulence to an aesthetic that would otherwise have the severity of a factory. Heller suggests that the specific inspiration for Cameron's iconic Dana Building was probably Sullivan's "gemlike" Bayard Condict Building in New York City (Heller 119).

(Left) Street-view of the Bayard Condict Building, Louis Sullivan (1899)
(Right) Close-up of Bayard Condict cornices and engravings

As Sullivan's only structure in Manhattan, the location certainly matches, but Bayard Condict doesn't fit the Dana Building's hard lines "revealing, [and] emphasizing the harmony of the steel skeleton within, as a body reveals the perfection of its bones" (*Fountainhead* 33). Rather than emphasizing its skeleton, Bayard is blanketed in stone. Highlighting further dissimilarities, Rand adds: "It [the Dana Building] had no other ornament to offer. It displayed nothing but the precision of its sharp angles, the modeling of its planes, the long streaks of its windows like streams of ice running down from the roof to the pavements" (*Fountainhead* 33). The Dana Building is not composed of smooth rendered brick laminated with ornate stone—it sounds more

like a jagged shard of glass erupting from the pavement. Though Bayard Condict is a patent tribute to craft and possibly the best looking American building of the late nineteenth-century, its style reaches out towards the past with a lingering hand. Winged angels peer down from ornamental friezes and watch over the street; lion's heads divided by pilasters burst from the stone and conceal the iron beneath; a corniced filigree tympanum welcomes every guest into elegant marmoreal rooms that could serve as the offices of a respected law-firm, or the well-lit drafting rooms of Francon and Heyer.

Like the relationship between Roark and Frank Lloyd Wright, Cameron and Sullivan share a spirit but not a unified aesthetic. As Cameron and Roark work long nights in the half-lit rooms of their office, we do not find them bent over intricate stone carvings and fluted pilasters. Rather than reaching into the past towards terracotta and brick, Cameron crusades for new materials and obsesses over glass and the future of plastics. Even after his death, this experimental and futuristic streak lives on in the designs of Roark.

II. The Heller House

After Cameron's retirement and his own violent ejection from Francon and Heyer, Roark finds work with architect John Erik Snyte. Flagrantly unprincipled and undiscriminating in style, Snyte collects young draftsmen like scientific specimens and labels them "Classic, Gothic, Renaissance and Miscellaneous" (*Fountainhead* 97–98). Rounding out the collection, Roark becomes Mr. "Modernistic" (*Fountainhead* 98). Every project in the office is staged as a competition in which each of the young designers draw up a plan before Snyte crudely synthesizes them to assemble the final masterpiece. "Six minds," he claims "are better than one" (*Fountainhead* 97). Roark watches as his designs are dissected piece by piece and stitched back

together with Colonial molding and Gothic vaults. The result is some freakish architectural Frankenstein. Though his walls of glass and open floor plans are buried beneath Palladian colonnades and Victorian chandeliers, Roark rests in the small satisfaction gained from his stylistic freedom and his opportunities for real-life problem solving.

A few months after Roark begins, Austen Heller, a columnist for *The Chronicle* (the arch-nemesis of the Wynand *Banner*), approaches Snyte with an idea for a home. Gathered in a semicircle with Gothic, Modernistic, etc., Snyte repeats the news to his designers:

> He [Heller] said something to the effect that he wanted a house of his own, he's hesitated for a long time about building one because all houses look alike to him and they all look like hell and he doesn't see how anyone can become enthusiastic about any house, and yet he has the idea that he wants a building he could love. "A building that would mean something" is what he said, though he added that he didn't know what or how. (*Fountainhead* 118)

Unknowingly, Heller addresses the key aesthetic issue in the novel: how can a home mean something? How can walls, concrete, and glass transcend their materials and become a "statement of [man's] life" (*Fountainhead* 541). Heller's proposition seems to puzzle everyone but Roark. That afternoon, Snyte and his band of followers take a trip to the site to get a better grasp on the situation. Arriving at an ocean cliff, they look up at a sheer rock formation "rising in broken ledges from the ground to end in a straight, brutal, naked drop over the sea" (*Fountainhead* 118). Swearing and twirling his pencil, Snyte remarks: "Just think of the blasting, the leveling one's got to do on that top" (*Fountainhead* 118–119). He orders photos sent to the office, but Roark returns to the site day after day to observe the rocks and the soil.

Instead of fighting the aggressive terrain, Roark embeds his structure into the rock. Like moss stretching and creeping into every crevice, the Heller House becomes an organic extension of the cliff.

> The house on the sketches had been designed not by Roark, but by the cliff on which it stood. It was as if the cliff had grown and completed itself and proclaimed the purpose for which it had been waiting. The house was broken into many levels, following the ledges of the rock, rising as it rose, in gradual masses, in planes flowing together up into one consummate harmony. The walls, of the same granite as the rock, continued its vertical lines upward; the wide, projecting terraces of concrete, silver as the sea, followed the line of the waves, of the straight horizon. (*Fountainhead* 119)

Clinging to the rock in tiered ascent, the house exploits the drama of the setting. Revising Sullivan's adage, Rand implies that form follows not just function, but also site and building material. Surely, any number of structures could have satisfied the function Heller desired, but only Roark's perfectly meshes with the surrounding land while enthroning man as the hero of the scene. The massive cantilevers and modelled masses do not dwarf its inhabitants; after all, man is the creator of this great structure. The building merely places man in perspective, accentuating and revealing the magnitude of his mighty works. Flouting physics, gravity, and the earth itself, the Heller House is a savage cry of defiance, a creed carved in stone and "a challenge," says Cameron, "in the face of something so vast and so dark" (*Fountainhead* 129). The sheer existence of the Heller House is a triumph over the impossible. Leaning over the conquered seas and cliffs below, the house emits a muffled roar captured in Rand's three holy words: "I will it!" (*Anthem* 95).

III. The Enright House

After construction of the Heller House, Roark's commissions remain scattered and infrequent. Though his projects are sufficiently stimulating, he receives barely enough work to keep busy at the drafting table and pay the bills for his single-room office. Since the Heller House receives little attention from the press and is deliberately ignored by Ellsworth Toohey, Roark relies on his work to speak for itself. Often, his clients are admirers of the Heller House,

or the "booby-hatch," as it comes to be known (*Fountainhead* 134). Roark does not bargain or compromise with his clients; he demands creative freedom and in exchange, delivers a unique structure. Utilizing increasingly experimental methods, Roark eventually designs the Gowan Filling Station, the Fargo Store, and the Sanborn House. Unable to still characterize Roark as simply a one-time phenomenon, the local publications begin to look askance at his growing popularity. In a small item from the bulletin of the Architects' Guild of America (A.G.A), the Sanborn House is begrudgingly mentioned: "Designed by one Howard Roark and erected at a cost of well over $100,000, this house was found by the family to be uninhabitable. It stands now, abandoned, as an eloquent witness to professional incompetence" (*Fountainhead* 168). Following the completion of the Fargo Store, Roark again receives scathing reviews from the A.G.A: "[O]nce upon a time, a little boy with hair the color of a Halloween pumpkin, who thought that he was better than all you common boys and girls. So to prove it, he up and built a house, which is a very nice house, except that nobody can live in it, and a store, which is a very lovely store, except that it's going bankrupt" (*Fountainhead* 174).

Gradually, and with slanderous help from the A.G.A., Roark becomes the black sheep of architectural circles. His tarnished name is greeted with disapproving glances, raised eyebrows, and hushed murmuring. In a desperate attempt to save his firm, Roark marches to the office of Roger Enright. Weeks prior, Roark had read in the paper that Enright, famous oil tycoon and part-time real estate developer, was planning an apartment complex in which each unit would be "complete and isolated like an expensive private home" (*Fountainhead* 174). The building was to be known as the Enright House, and as per Enright's explicit instructions, it was not to look like "anything anywhere else" (*Fountainhead* 174). Unable to arrange a meeting with Enright

himself, Roark unfolds his portfolio at the desk of a young secretary. After brief inspection, the man declares that Enright "would not be interested" (*Fountainhead* 174). With all hopes of future contracts dashed, Roark closes his office and retreats to the dusty mines of a Connecticut granite quarry.

In the summer heat, Roark sweats, bleeds, and chops stone block by the ton. Like Liberty 5–3000 in the fields of the peasant, Roark works alone. His rigid lines mesh well with the angular world of steel and stone. Dominique Francon, heir to the estate on which the quarry rests, takes note of the strange flame-haired man and his resemblance to "those statues of men she had always sought" (Fountainhead 207). Approaching through the shimmering, hellish heat Dominique asks: "You don't belong here, do you?" (*Fountainhead* 211). Thus begins the depiction of Dominique, a brooding antagonist turned passionate lover whose dizzying cognitive dissonance reveals Rand's affinity for complex internal conflict.

After several agonizing months, Roark's architectural furlough is suddenly halted by a letter from Roger Enright. In the note, Enright requests to speak personally with Roark regarding the future of the Enright apartment complex. Half an hour later, Roark hops on a train bound for New York and spares no time for farewells. Meanwhile, back in the city, Peter Keating eats his breakfast and peruses the newest "novel" by Lois Cook: "TOOTHBRUSH in the jaw toothbrush brush brush tooth jaw foam dome in the foam Roman dome come home home in the jaw Rome dome tooth toothbrush toothpick pickpocket socket rocket..." (*Fountainhead* 237). Cook, the newest addition to Toohey's aesthetic cohort, demands that Keating design a structure so "Magnificently ugly" that it stands forever as an open mockery of earthly beauty (*Fountainhead* 245). Free from the "burden" of rigid absolutes, Keating is happy to oblige and derives a sense of

achievement from the *Banner*'s excessive praise (*Fountainhead* 246). Rand notes of the structure: "He designed the house as she wished it. It was a three-floor edifice, part marble, part stucco, adorned with gargoyles and carriage lanterns. It looked like a structure from an amusement park" (*Fountainhead* 245).

While Cosmo-Slotnick and the designs of Francon and Heyer are at least imitations of a once-hailed perfection, the Cook House signals the coming of a new age. Even Toohey's *Sermons in Stone* can no longer survive in a world that cannibalizes beauty and sacrifices the flesh to new unsightly gods (*Fountainhead* 311). Honoring the post and lintel, the flying buttress, and an army of unsung craftsmen still rests on the premise that achievement is valuable, that shaping the world to our will and exalting human ability is an indisputable "good." While the architects of mediocrity and stagnation had said that beauty is based on the elegance of tradition, the Lois Cooks and Gus Webbs of the new aesthetic state that "A building needs no beauty, no ornament and no theme" (*Fountainhead* 492). Beauty becomes a vapid ideal intrinsically meaningless in itself; it becomes a mundane and bourgeois fascination, construed as the consummate enemy of equality. Toohey praises the achievements of the small and the common, but this is eventually insufficient to advance his full philosophical agenda. It's only by destroying the entire hierarchy, by damning all absolutes, all standards, and all values that man can be convinced to whip himself for his virtue and deliver the chains of slavery to his masters, begging to be shackled.

In the newspaper, Keating reads of Roark's return. Many had predicted that the Enright House would be just "another grand project on its way to the wastebasket," but at the bottom of

the page, Keating finds a sketch by Howard Roark (*Fountainhead* 221). Beside the angular signature, rests the newly approved plan for the Enright apartments.

> It was a structure on a broad space by the East River. He [Keating] did not grasp it as a building, at first glance, but as a rising mass of rock crystal. There was the same severe, mathematical order holding together a free, fantastic growth; straight lines and clean angles, space slashed with a knife, yet in a harmony of formation as delicate as the work of a jeweler; an incredible variety of shapes, each separate unit unrepeated, but leading inevitably to the next one and to the whole; so that the future inhabitants were to have, not a square cage out of a square pile of cages, but each a single house held to the other houses like a single crystal to the side of a rock. (*Fountainhead* 237–238)

The viewer's eye traces the building upwards in a calculated rhythm. The levels of the Enright house stack so naturally that the structure appears as if a molten flow were frozen in space. Its upper reaches stretch into the heavens, "rapt as raised arms" (*Fountainhead* 315). A prayer, not to God, but to man crosses the lips of every spectator who looks upon its warm skyline glow. Though only hewn of "pale gray limestone" its living walls are carved "by the most cutting of all instruments—a purposeful human will" (*Fountainhead* 315).

Though the metaphor of an organically grown crystal dominates the passage, perhaps words like "mathematical," "order," and "severe" are the source of frequent confusion regarding Rand's aesthetics. Phrases like "straight lines" and "clean angles" might suggest specious parallels between Roark's architecture and the German modernists' boxes. This might be a fairly cohesive critique if Rand had not explicitly identified the Bauhaus as a system of "conscious incompetence, creative poverty [and] mediocrity boastfully confessed" (*Fountainhead* 492). Reporting on the Enright House, a journalist remarks: "There's quite a school of it [modern architecture] in Germany that's rather remarkable—but this is not like that at all. This is a freak" (*Fountainhead* 316). In narration, Rand continues: "[...] in Germany, a new school of building

had been growing for a long time: it consisted of putting up four walls and a flat top over them, with a few openings. This was called new architecture" (*Fountainhead* 492). Here, Rand draws a distinction in the aesthetics of modernity: both Roark and the German Bauhaus are "modern" in material—steel, glass, concrete—but Rand contends that they have nothing essential in common. While the substantive physical aspects of Roark's designs are indeed modern, the emotional sum is unmistakably Romantic. Structures like the Heller House form a picture, not of human depravity or monolithic uniformity, but of a climb and a struggle. It's the composite image of man ascending upon earthly steps. Beside Roark's ladders to the heavens, Gus Webb and the architects of Toohey's acclaimed German modernism build hives for the invertebrate mob. The world becomes a maze of halls, tunnels, and cells—and man, an insect to fill them. As Rand once said: "You can't fight it by merely saying it's a difference of opinion. It's a difference between life and death" (Ayn Rand: The Phil Donahue Show).

IV. The Wynand Building

The Wynand Building is the second structure built for Gail Wynand and the final structure of the novel. Ushering Roark into his office, Wynand remarks: "This will be the last skyscraper ever built in New York. It is proper that it should be so. The last achievement of man on earth before mankind destroys itself" (*Fountainhead* 724). I think a younger Rand might have left the novel hanging on these prophetic words. After all, *We the Living* ends in a similar tone: "She smiled, her last smile, to so much that had been possible" (*WTL* 443). As she bleeds out in the white snow, Kira thinks back, much like Wynand, on all that could have been. As Roark leaves the office, Wynand calls after him: "Build it as a monument to that spirit which is

yours...and could have been mine" (*Fountainhead* 725). Their eyes meet, but Roark says nothing.

The final chapter begins in spring, eighteen months later. Dominique walks through the city towards the roaring machines shuffling materials beneath the Wynand Building. Above, a steel skeleton stretches into the sky:

> The top part of the frame still hung naked, an intercrossed cage of steel. Glass and masonry had followed its rise, covering the rest of the long streak slashed through space. She thought: They say the heart of the earth is made of fire. It is held imprisoned and silent. But at times it breaks through the clay, the iron, the granite, and shoots out to freedom. Then it becomes a thing like this. (*Fountainhead* 726)

Roark's buildings are consistently governed by this fluid-rigid paradox. Cut by hard lines and clean angles, the steel and stone serve as an enduring structural base, but when wrapped in outer shells of glass, his towers suddenly become a contiguous organic motion or a violent and unbound flame. Rand never provides detailed descriptions that might allow the precise replication of Roark's designs. At heart she's more interested in the poetics of the structure; she's interested in conjuring the feeling of observing the Wynand Building rather than the photographic experience. This is emblematic of Rand's mature style and the strict Romanticism she advances. Her worlds are not so meticulously detailed that we might count the pebbles beneath the hero's feet or recount his Saturday morning breakfast. Her novels are a dramatized sketch of the world in which all extraneous material has been painstakingly scrubbed from the picture. We do not need to know how many windows line the west wall of the Wynand Building in order to feel its strength. We do not need to count the floors to sense its eruption from the earth. Rand's goal was to provide the "life-giving" fuel of existence through emotional, not

intellectual means (*Manifesto* 170). Her desire was not to teach, but to provide "a moment of *metaphysical* joy—a moment of love for existence" (*Manifesto* 170).

As Dominique rises on the outside hoist to the upper reaches of the Wynand Building's steel frame, Roark stands outlined against the sea and the sky. He waves down and Dominique sees "the figure of Howard Roark" backgrounded by steel and empty space (*Fountainhead* 727). Here the story ends, making "Howard Roark" both the first and final words of the novel. It wraps the text in a clean circle and reminds us of its central image—one man above the world.

Chapter 7

Atlas Shrugged: **Romantic Industrialism**

***

> *He [Rearden] felt as if, after a journey of years through a landscape of devastation, past the ruins of great factories, the wrecks of powerful engines, the bodies of invincible men, he had come upon the despoiler, expecting to find a giant—and had found a rat eager to scurry for cover at the first sound of a human step.*
>
> —*Atlas Shrugged,* 1957

Rand's notes on *The Strike* (the working title of *Atlas Shrugged*) are first dated January 1, 1945. It would be more than twelve years before this tree-leveling opus was completed, but its legacy has lasted a lifetime. In a 1991 survey sponsored by the Library of Congress and the Book-of-the-Month Club, *Atlas Shrugged* was chosen by American readers as the second most influential novel of their lives, following the Bible (Heller xii). In 1998 by the Modern Library conducted a poll in which readers ranked all four of Rand's novels among the top ten greatest books (Heller xii). In 2012, the Library of Congress included *Atlas Shrugged* in an unranked list of "Books That Shaped America." Though popular appeal is no great measure of literary merit, the unflagging influence of *Atlas Shrugged* deserves serious consideration.

Among its many strengths, the novel is a world unto itself. At heart, *Atlas Shrugged* is a nineteenth-century epic trapped in the twentieth-century world. While its scope is massive, it intends to be more of a "social novel" than Rand's previous works (Harriman 390). While *The Fountainhead* dwells on the intricate psychology of its characters and the conflict of "individualism and collectivism within man's soul," *Atlas Shrugged* places these ideas in a larger social, political, and economic landscape (Harriman 390). Rand notes in her January 1st journal

entry: “In *The Fountainhead* I showed that Roark moves the world—that the Keatings feed upon him and hate him for it, while the Tooheys are consciously out to destroy him. But the theme was Roark—not Roark’s relation to the world. Now [in *Atlas Shrugged*] it will be the relation” (Harriman 392). In other words, Rand intended to elevate her old theme to a national scale and illuminate not just how *individuals* attempt to destroy the “creators,” but how entire systems conspire to leech, loot, and corrupt (Harriman 392). “This must be the world’s story” writes Rand, “Almost—the story of a body in relation to its heart—a body dying of anemia” (Harriman 393).

As the “prime movers” vanish under ever more mysterious circumstances, the heart of Rand’s world slowly stops beating (Harriman 393). It’s reduced to a “dreadful desolation” shown not only in “closed factories and ruins,” but also in the “spiritual emptiness, hopelessness, confusion, dullness, grayness, fear” (Harriman 392). For Rand, the world does not end in fire or sudden death—it rots in slow disintegration and a creeping “rigor mortis” (Harriman 395). The lights of the West don’t burn out in a violent flash—they flicker on tallow candles while the dim glow is slowly swallowed in the darkness (Harriman 395). For Rand’s heroes, a world of ruins and wrecks and rusty steel skeletons is more terrifying than death. This absolute return to nature is not pure and reverently harmonious as the Romantics once thought—it’s the picture of man’s surrender to the world of the “naked savage” (*Atlas Shrugged* 662). Reimagining the meaning of Romanticism’s ultimate enemy, *Atlas Shrugged* frames industry, not nature, as the embodiment of man’s soul and the object of his essential heroic endeavor.

For Rand, the natural world has no innate value outside the pleasure we derive from it. Thus, it cannot be preserved at our expense or meaningful in our absence. For this reason, *Atlas*

Shrugged is Rand's sharpest break with Romanticism. Train stations and steel mills dominate the woodland wilds and become new man-made shrines to replace Wordsworth's "temples of nature" (Selincourt 162). Taggart Terminal is perhaps the most prominent example:

> She [Dagny] did not take the elevator to the lobby of the building, but to the concourse of the Taggart Terminal. She liked to walk through it on her way home. She had always felt that the concourse looked like a temple. Glancing up at the distant ceiling, she saw dim vaults supported by giant granite columns, and the tops of vast windows glazed by darkness. The vaulting held the solemn peace of a cathedral, spread in protection high above the rushing activity of men. (*Atlas Shrugged* 59)

From the windows of the concourse, beams of light shine on the platforms and glance off the stone figure of a young Nat Taggart. His angular body takes the place of a cross in this hall of earthly worship: "[...] his statue had been Dagny's first concept of the exalted. When she was sent to church or to school, and heard people using that word, she thought that she knew what they meant: she thought of the statue" (*Atlas Shrugged* 61). The statue and the terminal are symbols in stone consecrated to the same idea: man hurling a challenge at the world and smiling at his fate. Looking up at the walls and the vaulted ceilings gives Dagny a moment of rest. The concourse honors the men of the mind as its holy saints, the only men worthy of Dagny's solemn bow. Her burden feels somehow lightened by the memory and the company of the great builders who stacked granite blocks to build this house of prayer. Unlike the old cathedrals, the Taggart terminal does not traffic in faith—it demands only purpose and conviction.

In *Atlas Shrugged*, buildings, factories, and machines are imbued with the life force of their creators. Stone halls and glass structures are more than just man's idle creations—they're living, breathing manifestations of the soul. As such, Rand adopts oddly organic language in her architectural descriptions—abandoned buildings become not just ruins, but rotting skulls or

decomposed corpses. This imagery creates a macabre deathscape of the Twentieth Century Motor Company and the shanty town nearby:

> A few houses still stood within the skeleton of what had once been an industrial town. [...] A shell of concrete, which had been a schoolhouse, stood on the outskirts; it looked like a skull, with the empty sockets of glassless windows, with a few strands of hair still clinging to it, in the shape of broken wires.[...] And then they stopped smiling. The corpse they saw in the weeds by the roadside was a rusty cylinder with bits of glass—the remnant of a gas-station pump. (*Atlas Shrugged* 282–283)

This is the complete inversion of Romantic conceptions of the industrial machine. The threat of nineteenth-century mechanization was the fear that dull, lifeless, and grotesquely inhuman metals would be elevated above or exist at the expense of human life. The force of the machine was seen as a cold reptilian cruelty. Rand, by contrast, found more life in a motor than in all the world's rocks and streams. While nature is chaotic and random, every machine is forged by man's purposed mind. As Dagny notes while walking in the engine room of a Taggart diesel:

> They [machines] are alive, she thought, because they are the physical shape of the action of a living power—of the mind that had been able to grasp the whole of this complexity, to set its purpose, to give it form. [...] They are alive, she thought, but their soul operates them by remote control. Their soul is in every man who has the capacity to equal this achievement. Should the soul vanish from the earth, the motors would stop, because that is the power which keeps them going— not the oil under the floor under her feet, the oil that would then become primeval ooze again—not the steel cylinders that would become stains of rust on the walls of the caves of shivering savages—the power of a living mind—the power of thought and choice and purpose. (*Atlas Shrugged* 246)

Dagny shouts in pure joy as the engines roar in the pounding violence of a man-made symphony. Sixteen motors stand by her side, each a separate and indelible mark upon the world. Forever, they remain a legacy of man's mind and a fiery testament to the force of his will. Nature, by contrast, has no discerning eye; its woodland streams and seaside cliffs are merely earthly

accidents. Rand saw no author, no purpose, and no meaning in this unintended beauty. If anything is truly lifeless and truly dead in Rand's novels, it's not the machine, but rather, the vast insentient matter of the wilderness.

The forests of *Atlas Shrugged* are not depicted as living cathedrals or manifestations of divinity as they might have been in centuries past—they're merely fresh soil ripe to be taken and staked with the Taggart flag. Rearden remarks to this effect on a road-trip out west: "'There's something to be said for the wilderness. I'm beginning to like it. New country that nobody's discovered'"; Dagny responds: "'It's good soil—look at the way things grow. I'd clear that brush and I'd build a—'" (*Atlas Shrugged* 282). It's not the wilderness that Rearden admires—it's the civilizational and industrial potential. It's the idea of a blank canvas ready for paint or a wild stallion waiting to be broken. Rearden isn't secretly longing for the melodic songs of swallows and the warm sunshine cast across his face—what he desires is a sense of self-efficacy, the sense that his ideas and his desires can shape the world and give meaning to its innate emptiness. He desires the one thing unique to man on Earth: the ability to set forth his wild imaginings, to carve the content of his mind in the blocks of reality. Rand's image of the cigarette expresses this idea: "I like cigarettes, Miss Taggart. I like to think of fire held in a man's hand." (*Atlas Shrugged* 61). Fire was once a force to be feared, a force that could consume and destroy, but the men of the mind tamed its power and placed it in our fingertips. Rearden imagines a similar fate for the wilderness—he sees a future world shaped by his hand and yoked to his will.

We first encounter Rearden and his industrial visions in the office above his steel mills. White-hot metal shimmers in the crucibles and the light from the first pour of Rearden metal slashes across his face in a dull red glow.

> [...] the liquid metal had no aspect of violence. It was a long white curve with the texture of satin and the friendly radiance of a smile. It flowed obediently through a spout of clay, with two brittle borders to restrain it. It fell through twenty feet of space, down into a ladle that held two hundred tons. A flow of stars hung above the stream, leaping out of its placid smoothness, looking delicate as lace and innocent as children's sparklers. (*Atlas Shrugged* 28)

The metal splashes to the ground, setting the soil on fire as it cools. The satin metal boils and erupts but remains insulated by the thick clay. Steam rises and tears apart the hot air while the silk-smooth fluid flows calmly to its destination. Rand deliberately mixes conflicting imagery to create a substance that is somehow obedient yet chaotic. She intends to prove that even forces of reckless power can be ruled by the mind. Like a harnessed draught-beast, the molten heat of the Earth is tamed and forced to run in rigid tracks dictated by mankind. Here, the image of the cigarette returns, but instead of one lingering ember, it's hundreds of tons of molten metal, trapped, insulated, and secured by the ingenuity of a single man.

The mills operate like an automated city fueled by Rearden's desire. Its unmanned structures cart endless ore and forged steel across the long yards. Like Rearden's "cruel" face, the mills are tireless, "unyielding," and unforgiving (*Atlas Shrugged* 28). Passengers watch the red glow from commuter trains and are struck by the mills' sharp lines and clean angles:

> [...] the building was dark, and the reflections of the train lights streaked across the solid glass of its walls.[...] The thing that came next did not look like a building, but like a shell of checkered glass enclosing girders, cranes and trusses in a solid, blinding, orange spread of flame.[...] The passengers could not grasp the complexity of what seemed to be a city stretched for miles, active without sign of human presence. (*Atlas Shrugged* 27)

Borrowing life from Rearden himself, the mills breathe plumes of steam and exhale raging fires. The glass walls reveal the structure's skeleton and the molten ore beating in its heart. In the purest sense, the mills *are* Henry Rearden. They are a glass city dedicated to his holiest ideal. As

Francisco later notes: “A city is the frozen shape of human courage—the courage of those men who thought for the first time of every bolt, rivet and power generator that went to make it. The courage to say, not ‘It seems to me,’ but ‘It is’— and to stake one’s life on one’s judgment” (*Atlas Shrugged* 512). The walls of Rearden’s mini-city make no effort to conceal the activities within. The jagged lines of glass and steel let the red glow shine through, like a beacon over the dark woods. In neon lights, Rearden’s name is borne for all to see—it flies like a medieval flag above a conquered world. The steel mill is more than just a factory— it’s a small victory for an idea that moved the world.

The implicit ideology of Reardens mills, that man’s creations should reflect his spirit, becomes the guiding architectural principle at Galt’s Gulch. Each home in Galt’s Colorado valley is built by a single pair of hands. Every stacked brick and plate of glass is a physical testament to man’s mind. By law of their society, every human soul remakes the earth in his own image and for his own enjoyment. Dagny looks out on the variety of modelled structures as she and Galt speed through the valley in a Hammond convertible:

> They were homes, small and new, with naked, angular shapes and the glitter of broad windows. Far in the distance, some structures seemed taller, and the faint coils of smoke above them suggested an industrial district. [...]The homes were not lined along a street, they were spread at irregular intervals over the rises and hollows of the ground, they were small and simple, built of local materials, mostly of granite and pine, with a prodigal ingenuity of thought and a tight economy of physical effort. Every house [...] had been put up by the labor of one man, no two houses were alike, and the only quality they had in common was the stamp of a mind grasping a problem and solving it. [...] The home of Dr. Akston was the last, a small cottage with a large terrace, lifted on the crest of a wave against the rising walls of the mountains. (*Atlas Shrugged* 728)

Galt’s Gulch nurtures an unusual Randian aesthetic. Throughout the valley, science fiction mingles with scenes of hand-built homes and vague visions of elegant pastoralism. Presumably

for lack of better materials, the inhabitants are forced to use lumbered pine and rough granite to build their homes. The structures are spread organically across the valley: they crawl up mountains, rest on sheer ledges, and mix harmoniously with the airfields, factories, and railroads. Fronting these humble structures are huge windows that look out on the valley below. The resulting scene recalls Thoreau's rustic Romanticism but also projects an efficient and glassy modernity. Shimmering in the sky above, a camouflage force-field protects the lands and a static motor provides limitless power. On the cliffs, Dagny imagines coal mines and railroads blasting their way through stone and laying their claim defiantly upon the land. Oddly, there are no Roarkian towers or gleaming city skylines in Galt's utopia of selfishness. Galt's Gulch is trapped somewhere between the Arts and Crafts heritage of William Morris and the brave new worlds of Aldous Huxley. It's trapped between burgeoning nineteenth-century industrialism and prophetic visions of a hyper-technological future.

As Dagny and Galt climb the hills and approach the power plant housing the static motor, the homes become increasingly humble, a trend that culminates in Francisco d'Anconia's isolated log cabin. The house is "built in loneliness, cut off from all ties to human existence" and looks like "the secret retreat of some great defiance or sorrow" (*Atlas Shrugged* 728). Francisco's hut depicts a moral, but not aesthetic ideal. Neither Rand nor Francisco is secretly enticed by the modesty of the rustic or the cozy smell of woodland pine. Instead, Francisco relishes the simple joy of forging the world anew; he basks in the confidence gained from shaping the earth stone by stone and limb by limb. In Galt's Gulch, to quote Nietzsche, "the swarming vermin of the 'cultured'" can never "feast on the sweat of every hero" (*Zarathustra* 217). The world Francisco builds is his and his alone, something that can't be said for life

outside the valley. A log cabin is not the summation of Francisco's aesthetic fantasies; it is not the "climax of the d'Anconias" (*Atlas Shrugged* 89). But for the time being, he is satisfied with twigs, leaves, and even weeds in the one garden he can call his own.

As evinced by the valley, Rand sees no existential strife between machine and man; technology does not herald the inevitable fate of human extermination. Materials in Rand's novels are insentient and metaphysically meaningless in themselves. She sees no Romantic virtue in the hand-crafted or inherent vice in the machine-made. Dagny feels the same pleasure riding on the Taggart Comet as she does reclaiming the wilds at her Adirondack cabin. The machine is simply a vehicle of efficiency; it's a method by which man can exert more force than humanly possible, a method by which he might actualize his dreams on a grander scale. Industry is just a steely augmentation for the human form. Its metal hands are still articulated by the human mind. Though his creations are orchestrated by an army of machines, Rearden still looks back on a self-made life, a "Rearden Life" as he remarks (*Atlas Shrugged* 32). The bonds that bind Taggart Terminal, Rearden Steel, and the d'Anconia hut far transcend the superficiality of aesthetic industrialism or bucolic simplicity—they are united by a common creed and a cult of the spirit. They are forged together by a solitary vision of man: the unsullied soul who sings, laughs, dreams, and walks in his own way. In stone, steel, and wood these structures light their own beacons above the darkness and proclaim their solemn pride for all the world to witness. They embody the holy words engraved on the stone transom above the power plant: "I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man nor ask another man to live for mine" (*Atlas Shrugged* 731).

Chapter 8

Conclusion

***

> *It is a small thing for the spirit to remove mountains,—did you know that before? You know only the sparks of the spirit: but you do not see the anvil which it is, and the cruelty of its hammer! You know not the spirit's pride! [...] And never yet could you cast your spirit into a pit of snow: you are not hot enough for that!*
>
> —*Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* 1891

Quoting some unnamed Greek Philosopher, Rand liked to say "I will not die; it's the world that will end" (Rand *Writers Speak*). Of course, the world did not end, and we live in the age that she predicted and feared—the era of irony, the era of the tongue-in-cheek. We want characters who feel real; we want banter, office politics, silly squabbles, and in the end, we're left with a sad sum. We laugh "at man the hero," but ultimately we laugh at our own expense (*Manifesto* 133). We respond to profundity with a snicker and a sardonic wink—heroism seems like an antiquated fantasy. The pages of our tales are not set in black and white—they're a sloppy smudge of gray representing an "uncommitted, passively indeterminate sense of life" (*Manifesto* 39).

This bleak picture of art in our age equally encompasses architecture. Perhaps the most egregious offender is Frank Gehry. His structures are shapeless, oozing amoebas. At his best, the result looks like a melting Dali canvas, and at his worst, it looks like someone lent a welding torch to the inmates of an insane asylum. If Rand were alive, she would call his structures an attempt to concretize the moment of reality's disintegration.

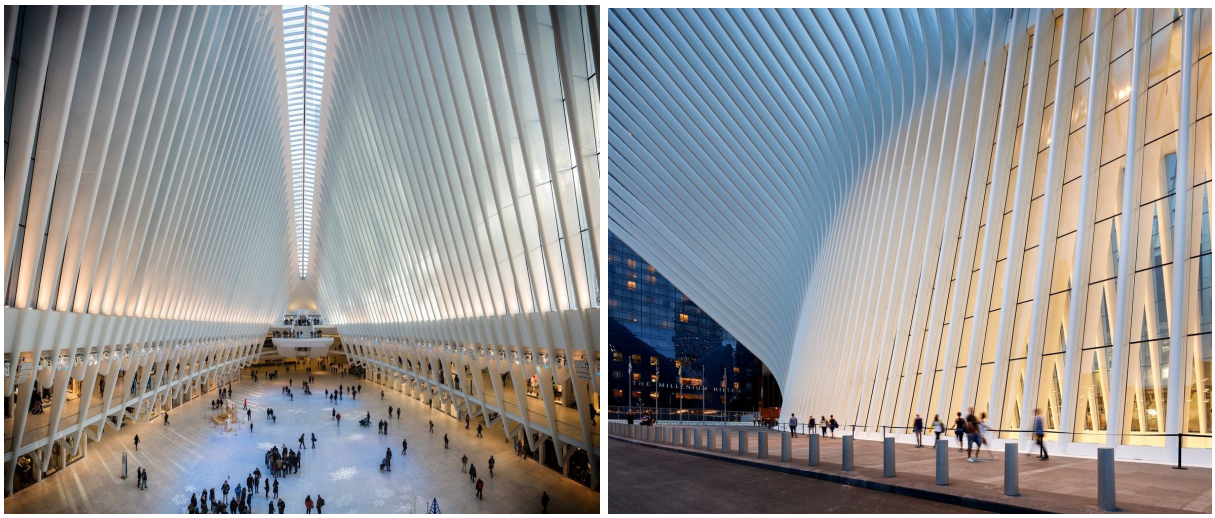
(Left) Museum of Pop Culture, Frank Gehry, Seattle, 2000
(Right) Marqués de Riscal Hotel, Frank Gehry, Spain, 2006

Shapeless contortion characterizes Gehry's recent work, but his buildings from the mid-nineties are equally absurd. Often grafting the shape of some household object onto an unwilling host, the structures look like bizarre carnival attractions. Perhaps the most famous examples are El Peix (Barcelona, 1992), sculpted like a massive fish carcass, and the Chiat/Day Building (Los Angeles, 1991), an office with a pair of massive binoculars functioning as its facade.

Senselessly flamboyant structures in the guise of free expression and humor are not art. I don't want to live in the physical manifestations of Gehry's incoherent experiments. Gehry, and many Postmodernists like him, harbor a grim nihilism behind their seemingly benign levity. They seem participants in some Toohey-esque contest of ugliness. The world smiles, laughs, praises, and somewhere in the commotion our values are muddled and lost. Existence isn't a colossal joke; the shape of the world matters; the environments we inhabit matter.

Fortunately, there is a cause for hope. Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, a modernist for the new age, pioneered the single-pylon cable-stayed bridge and rose to fame. His structures raise modern materials to dramatic new heights. They breathe light and air through their open

walls and carve defiantly upwards into the sky. Calatrava's designs resemble those of the young Howard Roark, and they've been greeted with the same strident opposition. Critics resent his brash disregard for historical style and architectural continuity. They compare his structures to bleached skeletons.



(Left) World Trade Center Transportation Hub, New York , 2016
(Right) World Trade Center Transportation Hub (Exterior)

In many ways they're right. His girders are like white skeletons marking the death of all the old styles. His structures look like no others, but that seems to be the intention. Calatrava does not pretend to revere Renaissance relics or Manhattan's International boxes. His structures are modern cathedrals dedicated not to deities, but to man's achievements. There are no friezes or frescos to be found in the great halls of his Manhattan Transportation Hub— Calatrava's structures are decorated only by the beauty of their own sculpted form.

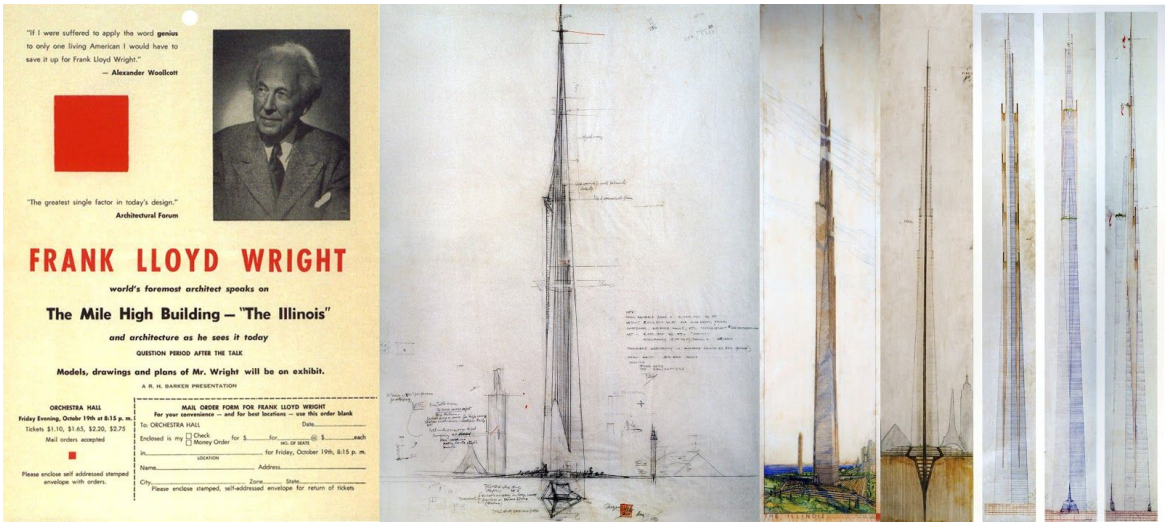
(Left) Assut de l'Or Bridge, Valencia, Spain, 2008
(Right) The City of Arts and Sciences, Valencia, Spain, 2005

Despite his monochromatic palette and an aversion to traditional ornamentation, Calatrava's designs are far from the blank sterility of the Bauhaus. His variety of modelled masses evoke the fossilized remains of some noble beast. His single-pylon bridges arch their backs and pull towards the heavens as if some great battle between earth and sky were frozen in space. Alone on the horizon, the pillar of the Assut de l'Or Bridge resists all the tensioned chains shackled to its spine. In a crescendo of expertly balanced forces, the structure remains poised at its violent height. Beneath the steel and glass of his buildings, Calatrava has trapped the still image of a struggle, the image of a purposeful life.

To convey human emotion in the medium of steel and cement is a special feat of creativity. Architects have no words or images to advance their theme. Instead, they reach within our souls towards some foggy vision of triumph, towards some preconceptual passion that we vaguely sense but cannot name. For years Frank Lloyd Wright chased after this feeling—he groped in the dark across prairie plains and Pennsylvania forests, longing to create something "serene and violent at once" (*Fountainhead* 237). In his final book, *A Testament* (1957), Wright unveiled a special project: a design for the first "Mile High Building." The Illinois, as it was

called, was a blade of jagged steel that could tear apart the sky and vanish into the clouds above. Its smooth planes look like the cuts of a gemstone or the clean rendered lines of a purposeful will. As it rises by steps toward its knife-edge spire, the Illinois evokes the crystalline profile of Roark's Enright House. Perhaps, in a beautiful cycle of fate, Wright was inspired by Roark, just as Roark was once inspired by him.

With Wright's death in 1959, the project was relegated to the architectural scrap heap and the occasional museum retrospective. Wright's sceptics considered it further evidence of his eccentric dotage. They said that the tower would buckle under its own weight or be shaken apart by the slightest gust of wind. Though Wright trusted in the strength of his steel and the aerodynamics of his design, construction of the Illinois would never be attempted. It exists today only in faded blueprints and in the realm of our imagination—a monument to the world that could have been.



(Above) Schematics and poster for Wright's unbuilt tower, "The Illinois" (1957)

This year marks sixty years since Wright's death and nearly forty since Rand's. Though I'm sure they would marvel at our technological advancements, the world is far from what it

"could be and should be" (*Fountainhead* 337). Monochrome canvases sell for millions of dollars and cubes of New York City garbage are auctioned to eager connoisseurs. We live in the future Rand predicted more than seventy-five years ago. Much of the art scene today reads like Lois Cook and looks like Gus Webb. Even before her own death, Rand saw the world creeping in this direction, but this should come as no surprise. After all, Rand's novels are dystopias of the near future—they depict an apocalypse set to begin next year, next month, or the day after tomorrow. This looming threat of the ominous present has always made Rand difficult to classify in the lineage of twentieth-century fiction. Novels like *Brave New World, 1984*, and *Fahrenheit 451* are all set in a relatively distant future. Their worlds are rife with futuristic technology and state indoctrination—things that feel comfortably detached from our lives. We can safely relegate Soma and Big Brother to the confines of our imagination. We can shrug as Winston Smith, John the Savage, and the last descendants of Romanticism are crushed within a technological "paradise."

From Rand there is no escape. She maintains the crisis of the lone hero but vitiates the comfortable distance of future centuries. While Huxley and Orwell are content to let their audience spectate in the arena of ideological battle, Rand tosses us into the pits. She captures the evils of the world, strips them of their disguise, and leaves them knocking at our door. In Rand's worlds it's not invasive technocracies that oppress; it's not televisions and surveillance cameras—it's ideas that propagate only by the "sanction of the victim" (*Atlas Shrugged* 461). It's not the fist of the world that we have to fear; it's not Big Brother's scrutinizing eyes or posters of Lenin decaying on peeling walls—the true villain is never so obvious. The face of real tyranny lurks in shadowy corners and smuggles itself into our souls; it goes caparisoned in words

of virtue and extolls the saints of pop-cultural morality. Echoing Nietzsche, Rand warns that of all things evil, we must fear most the beguiling "abyss" towards which we willingly descend (*Beyond Good and Evil* 69).

Rand's point is deeper than economics or politics. Her novels present a set of alternatives that determine our view of man, our view of life—man as a hero or man as a slave? A man who chooses or a man who obeys? Should we live by each other's happiness or each other's misery? Should we give our lives to cruel masters who cage us, drill us, treat us like animals? Or should we be free from the collar of brutes, the chains of kings and the laws of gods—free to bend a knee only to our own glory. We alone have the power to create, to build, to make the world free and beautiful. Alone, with the world spread before us we must find the audacity, the arrogance, the pride to dedicate our works, our kingdoms not to God, not to tyrants, but to man. In the face of a challenge so vast and dark before us, Rand asks only that we set forth with Cameron's words of courage in our hearts: "Don't be afraid" (*Fountainhead* 176).

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